

**Inside Orthodox Judaism:  
A Handbook for Missionaries (embedded #8200712025) v1**

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# Introduction

The reason why I published this work (publicly and free of charge) is to share the information and experience that I have gathered over the years. This information could be useful for missionaries who are within Jewish circles or the one's that are located in Israel. This work might be overly technical at times but this is only the case because Orthodox Judaism is very technical. Don't expect Jews to convert to Christianity because of some emotional feeling (although it can happen). However, one thing is for sure, you don't need to have a PhD in Jewish Studies in order to have a theological conversation with Jews in order to bring them to Christ.

Additionally, my focus will be towards Orthodox Judaism because I managed to convert to Orthodox Judaism (Haredi) and studied at an Orthodox Yeshiva (seminary). The conversations that you will have with non-Orthodox Jews will be much easier as they won't be excommunicated by their community if they would convert to Christianity. When a Orthodox Jew would convert to Christianity he/she might lose their job, family and friends depending on how their social and professional life looks like. Additionally, I strongly advise you to have a look at "ONE FOR ISRAEL Ministry" ([www.oneforisrael.org](http://www.oneforisrael.org)). They have a great YouTube channel which also counters anti-missionary arguments in great detail. "Truth Unites" (<https://truthunites.org/>) is another great resource.

What you do, or can do, with this information is up to you. You might only want to use it for the source references. Or you might find an angle for X,Y,Z while keeping in mind a certain argument that I presented. One thing that I do want to share with you is that any missionary activity in Jerusalem, Israel can be dangerous and there is an extensive anti-missionary network which reaches outside of Jerusalem, even into government positions. I also can't advice anyone to convert to Orthodox Judaism because it takes up too many resources and energy. I did it so you don't have to, and please don't reinvent the wheel. My last advice is not to say anything Christian, or missionary related when using an Israeli smartphone, or when in a taxi. Yes, there are bigger missionary organizations in Israel who speak openly however they are facing verbal or even physical violence:

“our building was set alight in a act of arson, and on the same day we saw an unprecedeted riot at a national Israeli worship event in Jerusalem. Dr. Erez Soref shares about the damage at the Bible college and the increasing violence against messianic Jews in Israel.” (<https://www.oneforisrael.org/pod-for-israel/fire-damages-one-for-israel-campus-and-riots-at-worship-event-in-jerusalem-pod-for-israel/> )

The research material for the Torah/bible/Pentateuch come from the King James Bible and was double checked with the English and Biblical Hebrew text in the Chumash Artscroll Stone edition<sup>1</sup>. The English text in the Chumash Artscroll differs sometimes with its own Biblical Hebrew text. In such cases the English is an interpretation that is more convenient for Orthodox Judaism than the original Hebrew text. For example, the word Jew and Judaism were never mentioned in the Torah. However, it is mentioned in the Artscroll Chumash.

The Talmudic sources are verified with at least two, but mostly with three different sources (triangulation method). The primary source comes from the website of Rabbi Dr. Tzvee Zahavy<sup>2</sup>. The second source is sefaria.org and the third source is Rabbi Weinbach, M<sup>3</sup>. The latter source is not used with *aggadic* texts. Other research material is mentioned in the footnotes.

The research method used was a critical comparison of the text in scripture and the explanation on these texts by of Orthodox Judaism. Moreover, the concept of "unchanged *mesorah*" is questioned by comparing different opinions, traditions and *halachot*. The limitations of this book are the anonymization of people (including myself) and institutions. This choice was made in order to protect some of my former friends and people that could receive some form of negative feedback.

The last thing that I want to make clear is that I make a differentiation between “Biblical Judaism/Monotheism/YHVH ism” and “rabbinic Judaism”.

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<sup>1</sup> Scherman, R. N. (1998,2000). The Chumash: The Torah, Haftaros And The Five Megillos With Commentary Anthologized From The Rabbinic Writings. New York: Mesorah Publications.

<sup>2</sup>www.halakhah.com

<sup>3</sup>Weinbach, M. (2001).The weekly daf: Insights and lessons on Daf Yomi selections. Targum Press.

# **Streams and groups within the Jewish world**

## **The main Jewish ethnic groups:**

**Mizrachi:** Iraq, Iran, Bukhari

**Yemenite:** Yemen

**Ashkenazim:** Western, Central, Northern and Eastern Europe and Russia.

**Sephardi** Morocco, Algeria, Spain, Portugal, Tunisia

(Most people make the generalization of Ashkenazi and Sephardi. Moreover, each has its own subgroups for example Polish Ashkenazi and Russian Ashkenazi.)

## **Denominations within Orthodox Judaism:**

It is very difficult, if not impossible to label every kind of Orthodox Jew. However, I think that it is very helpful to make it clear to the reader that there are different denominations within Orthodox Judaism.

### ***Definition of Orthodox Judaism:***

*"A major branch within Judaism which teaches strict adherence to rabbinical interpretation of Jewish law and its traditional observances. There are more than 600 rules governing religious and everyday life."<sup>4</sup>*

**Haredi:** Largest group which has Sephardi and Ashkenazi leading rabbis for both ethnic groups. Both groups follow different Halachic opinions.

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/orthodox-judaism>

**Hasidic:** Can include non-Ashkenazim however these have to give up their *minhag* (custom). This stream and its sub-streams are often considered "ultra" Orthodox by the secular world. However they are not more stringent than Haredi Jews. The only issues through which they can be considered "ultra" is halacha. Because they include kabalistic sources and often choose the more stringent form of halachic ruling. That being said one should not come to think that this never happens in Haredi circles therefore, it is very difficult to consider the Hasidim "ultra". Although one can make a valid argument that they are ultra-Orthodox because the Hasidic stream is even more closed off from the outside world than the Haredi community. However then again where does one draw the line?

**Hasidic Substreams (sub-denominations) and some well-known Dynasties:**

Breslov, Chabad, Belz, Ger, Vizhnitz, Ashlag, Boston, Dushinsky, Toldos Aaron.

**Chardal:** meaning Haredi - Le-um or in English, "Nationalist Haredi".

**Modern Orthodox:** Most are religious Zionist (Dati-Leumi) and are more involved with the secular world such as going to a secular and scientific oriented school. I would classify their behavior as taking the "best of both worlds" because they have a tendency to follow halacha (Jewish law) rather selectively based upon their own needs. Moreover, this group does not have their own leading rabbi's therefore, they must follow general Haredi Ashkenazi or Sephardi rabbis. However, the problem is that these rabbis rule more stringently than the Modern Orthodox wishes to follow and therefore will look for a leniency within the law.

Modern Orthodox is often, if not always, the most liberal stream within Orthodox Judaism. One personal example is that I have visited Modern Orthodox families who watched 'non modest' Hollywood movies while the leading rabbis would never permit such things. Surely there is a difference between staring and looking at an 'immodest' dressed person. However, if you know that you will see nudity (nudity according to Halacha) one should not watch the movie. It is interesting to ask oneself where this stream will end up, maybe this group will produce their own

rabbi's at some point in time. It has to be mentioned that Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik was the only true leading Modern Orthodox Rabbi. However, he still did not *pasken* (decide/rule) on Halachic issues, and even if he did it could never become the accepted norm because of his minority opinion status within Orthodoxy. Alternatively, this stream could dissolve because the gap between the modern world and the Orthodox could increase significantly so that the concept of "modern" will exclude Orthodox Judaism (incompatibility of the two).

Additionally, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik is perceived as one of the most important contributors to modern Orthodox Judaism (often non Dati-Leumi). Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook is considered the main Rabbi in Dati-Leumi circles (although he was basically Hasidic).

**Alternative Orthodox:** I use this term in connection with Jews that don't fit into the above mentioned streams of Orthodoxy. Alternative Orthodox Jews keep Shabbat and the kosher laws. However they are not part of a larger community which is essential to Orthodox Judaism (praying in minyan, ten men etc.). Additionally, these individual Orthodox Jews often have certain habits, hobbies and/or character traits that can never be accepted within mainstream Orthodox communities. For example, the Orthodox Jew that likes to listen to heavy metal, loves to study different religions or ancient Greek philosophy. Such individuals have an easier time within the modern Orthodox stream, however even there it can be not accepted.

Moreover, another word for these "alternative" Orthodox Jews would be misfits or rather "unorthodox Orthodox" which is of course a contradiction in terms. therefore, it is questionable if they really can be considered Orthodox at all because heavy metal and study of foreign religion and philosophy should be substituted by Torah study and religious music or with something that stands more in relationship to Judaism. Additionally, as mentioned previously the community is essential to Orthodox Judaism and one can't place himself or herself outside of it and still live an Orthodox Jewish lifestyle.

**Fringe Orthodoxy:** Fringe Orthodoxy does not differ that much from alternative orthodox. The only distinction that I can make between them is that they are open to novel and non-Orthodox interpretations of the Torah. They form their own opinion which has its roots in science or is inspired by it. This does not differ greatly from some modern orthodox communities. However,

the fringe side tends to have a more open mind when looking at scripture. One could even possibly argue that they flirt with non-orthodox denominations. I consider Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo to be an example of such "Fringe Orthodox" Judaism.

## Zionism and anti-Zionism in Orthodox Judaism

Generally speaking, most Orthodox Jews are for the concept of a Jewish state however, it has to be a "true" Jewish state in which Orthodox norms are accepted as the standard. Many believe that this only will happen when the Messiah arrives and that prior to the Messianic period Israel is no different than any other country. This is why many Haredim and Hasidim live outside Israel.

Modern Orthodox Jews, or at least the ones who are Dati-Leumi (religious nationalist) belief that it is a *Mitzva* (commandment) to settle in the holy land (Israel) whether it has a secular government or not. Because according to them the land itself is *Kodesh* (Holy) and that it was given to the Jews to inhabit. Moreover, there is one 'extreme' group within Dati-Leumi who are called settlers, they belief that one has to actively settle/colonize the land. No matter if it is already inhabited by Palestinians or not, these aggressive settlers often attack Palestinian villages directly or indirectly. There is also a small group of Orthodox Jews that are Anti-Zionist. They believe that no Jew should live in Israel until the coming of the Messiah. Their vision is stronger than the general Orthodox view in the sense that one must not live in Israel prior to the arrival of the Messiah. A group that identifies themselves as Anti-Zionist is the Neturei Karta group.

Left-wing or labor Zionism (pro two state solution) is not compatible with Orthodox Judaism because left-wing or labor Zionism has strong secular characteristics. Its people often adhere to a non-Orthodox Jewish denomination or are secular. One could argue that a secular person is not in need of a Zionist movement because he or she is not Jewish (practically speaking). However, such people often see a Zionist state as a protection against "antisemitism" or rather the hate towards anything that could be linked with Judaism. An example is that Hitler's qualification of a Jew is somebody who has Jewish ancestors. And this is not a Halachic qualification of a who is a Jew. therefore, if people remain of the opinion that Judaism is a 'race' or one ethnicity the secular left-wing or labor Zionists are in a need of Zionism.

## Clarification on the term Jew and Judaism

Judaism which is practiced by Jews is a religion like any other, meaning that it is not one Culture or genetics. And although it has cultural aspects, it remains a religion that can fit within the framework of any major Culture. Moreover, Jews are not part of one ethnic group but multiple such as Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrachi, Yemenite and some argue Ethiopian Jews. The Oxford dictionary defines "ethnic group" as follows: "*A community or population made up of people who share a common cultural background or descent*"<sup>5</sup>. A concrete example is that Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews both have different Cultures and within these two groups there are subdivisions such as Polish Ashkenazi versus German Ashkenazi culture (minor culture) which includes differences such as clothing, language and food. Additionally, more material cultural such as technology and architecture mostly differs between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews. The only theme that connects them is Judaism as a religion (even there they have different Halachic interpretations). Some argue that there is such a thing as Jewish Culture however every "Cultural Jew" that I asked the question to of what it means to have a Jewish Culture either leads back to Jewish religious reasons or to silence (again different Ethnic Jewish groups have different Halachic rulings).

David Shasha who is the Director of the Center for Sephardi Heritage wrote in the Huffington post (2010) about the topic of the Sephardic-Ashkenazi split. He states that:

"In terms of the Jewish future, the Sephardi-Ashkenazi split is of immense importance. Understanding the cultural differences between the two groups is vital for our political interests. Ironically, even the articulation of these differences has become a dangerous matter given the ways in which Ashkenazi Jews have come to dominate Jewish life the world over. The third rail of Jewish politics is one that has served to destabilize a civilization that at one time valued the Sephardic tradition as its most valuable model of cultural identity".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup><http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/ethnic-group> retrieved on 1-8-2016

<sup>6</sup>[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-shasha/understanding-the-sephard\\_b\\_541033.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-shasha/understanding-the-sephard_b_541033.html) Retrieved on 16-9-2016

To clarify terms used, the word Ashkenazi means a Jew of German and eastern European descent, and Sephardi entails Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East descent. One could argue that the State of Israel eventually will culturally fuse them together. However, this does not mean that every person has to be Jewish. It means that people would be Culturally Israeli in which it is possible to be Muslim, Christian or Jewish. Moreover, Jewish as any other religion can be combined with one's main Cultural identity such as American, Belgian or French Culture. You would end up with: Spanish Jewish culture (Sephardi) in which a main Culture such as the Spanish Culture is influenced by one's religious culture. For example, Jewish dogma of *Kosher* food influenced recipes. One could call it a Kosher twist on the local cuisine. Examples of these different kosher cuisines are: **Ashkenazi**: Bagel (Poland), Borscht (Russia, Ukraine), Kugel and Rugelach. **Sephardi**: Baklava (Levant area), Couscous (North Africa), Falafel, Halva and Jachnun (Yemen).

Moreover, to clarify, I am not stating that there is no such thing as a religious culture. I am only stating that it can never be a main Culture spelled with capital C (civilization), because it (religion) merely is just an aspect of the bigger Culture that contains more aspects then just religion.

Max Weber explains in his work: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* How religion and specific denominations of it can influence society. One could perceive it as a social spillover effect, a spillover from religious culture (minor culture) to other elements of culture which together form a main Culture. These other forms of culture would be norms, values and material cultural aspects such as architecture. However, this does not mean that a spillover effect of religion automatically would influence all other parts of culture. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* the spillover effect, effected norms and behavior which effected the economy. One could see this as a double spillover effect. Additionally, Max Weber always used Judaism in combination with religion, in the Introduction of the 2005 Routledge version which was written by Anthony Giddens it is mentioned that doctrines that originated in Judaism were eventually perpetuated into Western Culture.

"For the first origins of Judaism in ancient Palestine mark the nexus of circumstances in which certain fundamental differences between the religions of the Near and Far East became elaborated. The distinctive doctrines forged in Judaism were perpetuated in Christianity, and hence

incorporated into Western Culture as a whole"<sup>7</sup>.

Religion can effect different aspect of society. However, the opposite is also true, society can influence religious aspects. A good example is the difference between Sephardi and Ashkenazi, both have and had different ways of dressing (outside modern Israel). Additionally, their language and food culture is also significantly different. Their material culture (architecture) differs from one and other. I did not place pictures in this book because of potential copyright issues. However, the reader can easily compare and Google Yemenite Jews and compare them with Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews. Moreover, when one compares the Hasidic dress with the Ashkenazi Haredi dress one will automatically notice the Hasidic *shtreimel* (fur hat) which came from eastern Europe and is still being worn today in Israel. Additionally, when one compares the pictures of synagogues of Ashkenazi Jews to Sephardi synagogues one can see that the seating arrangement is different and also the rest of the interior is not the same. Again, the food recipes of each Jewish group looks, smells and tastes differently, one cannot compare Yemenite "chollent" to Ashkenazi chollent. The only thing that they have in common is that they are cooked with kosher products and in a kosher manner such as a kosher oven. The exception to the rule can be Israel because people from different ethnic groups married each other and their recipes got mixed and became an Israeli cuisine. Moreover, in Israel people speak one language (Modern Hebrew) and the Haredi Orthodox Sephardi community followed Ashkenazi Haredi clothing standards (black-white). It could be argued that in the long run all Orthodox people will mix their customs. However, this is unlikely because Orthodox Judaism belief that one's father *Minhag* (tradition) should be followed unless you are a convert or your father is not Jewish.

People that argue that Judaism is a Culture and not just a religious culture generally are not religious but still want to identify themselves as Jewish. One reason could be that such illogical thoughts come from an identity crisis or from a certain need to belong to a group of people that want to prevent the extinction of Jewish teachings. Whatever their conscious or subconscious motivations are does not matter to the fact that Judaism does not belong, rationally speaking, in

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<sup>7</sup> Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005. P, xv

the same sentence as English, Russian, American and Chinese et cetera. Moreover, if somebody would tell you that he or she is a Christian but does not believe in Jesus, in the religious sense then one would be greatly confused how this is possible. The answer is simple, rationally it is not possible because Christianity without the dogma of Jesus as THE Savior is not Christianity. A religion without *Theos* is not a religion. One could make the theological argument that if one is baptized a Christian, one would remain for the rest of his/her life a Christian. However here one must admit that belief is in the conscious mind. It takes an active decision to believe in something, and when one believes the opposite of the religious dogma one does not belong to the dogma he/she opposes. therefore, the term: a Jewish, Christian, or Muslim atheist is a contradiction in terms. However, one could claim that one is partially spiritual in nature and combine this with a liberal form of a Jewish dogma and science. therefore, it is possible to call oneself Jewish while not adhering to Orthodox Jewish Dogma and theology. However, one still has to celebrate certain Jewish holidays and belief in a form of *Theos*. How one perceives and gives meaning to this *Theos* is not relevant. As long as one combines some kind of *Theos* with Jewish festivals one could consider him/herself Jewish.

I will give an example of an argument and reasoning that some people use in order to claim that a Jew is not just a religious person but a people. Dror Ben Ami wrote an article for Jpost on 04/13/2016 with the title "Can a Person Convert to Judaism<sup>8</sup>?" he immediately gives the answer in the first sentence of his article: "No. There is no such thing as conversion to Judaism in the written Torah, it is something the rabbis invented (i.e. Their predecessors: The Pharisees)."

Then the author goes on about Israeli citizenship and that the Israeli ministry of interior only wants to know if your mother is Jewish and that they do not care what religion one has. At this point it already becomes evident that the author makes a direct connection with Israeli citizenship and being Jewish. However, he forgets the Russian and Ethiopian population in Israel that either converted to Judaism or only have a Jewish father or grandfather. The Arab Muslims (Israeli-Arab Muslims) who are Israeli got their citizenship because of the political situation. The author then clarifies his point: "The point is: A Jew is a member of the people formerly known as

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<sup>8</sup><http://www.jpost.com/Blogs/Torah-Commentaries/Can-a-Person-Convert-to-Judaism-409549> Retrieved on 6/5/2016

either Hebrews or Israelites. Judaism is the religion practiced by those people."

Does this mean that only Hebrews and Israelites can practice the religion of Judaism? If so, then how do you explain the 'converts' Abtalion and Shmaya who lived during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE? Abtalion was a 'rabbinic' sage and also Shmaya was an important figure in 'Jewish' life. And what about Ruth? (Ruth 1:16-17, KJV) who became the great-grandmother of King David (Ruth 4:17, KJV). Alternatively, people could think that Judaism should ideally only be practiced by Hebrews/Israelites however this would mean that people with such an opinion support Nativism and truly think that they are 'pure' Hebrews/Israelites or that there is such a thing as a 'pure' Jew. I am not willing to discuss this subject any further because it reminds me of Hitler's definition of a Jew. The Ashkenazi decease (genetics) does exist because they intra-married a lot in Eastern European Ghetto's and villages. However, these days we all know that "pure race" thinking includes severe tribal intra-marriage, which means a higher chance of having an unhealthy child.

The author then continues to give an example of Uriah the Hittite and how he was a stranger who was allowed to live among the Jews if he followed the Jewish Laws. He then goes on stating that this does not make him an Israelite because he is called the Hittite.

Sure one can argue that Uriah the Hittite was not an Israelite. However, he must have went through some sort of "conversion/acceptance" because he married Bathsheba who was allegedly from King David's own tribe and the chances are very small that an Israelite women was allowed to marry a non-Israelite men. Orthodox Jewish dogma states that one is Jewish if one is a convert or one's mother is Jewish, not because of any ethnic tribal reason but simply because of theological reasons. So it is possible to be a Hebrew/Israelite (who ever that might be these days), Arab, Slav and also be Jewish. However, it remains questionable if all born Jews are really Jewish because there still exist a small chance that someone's great-grandmother is not Halachically (according to Jewish law) Jewish. Finally, the author attacks the notion of Jewish conversion:

*"The rabbis like to spread the lie that in Exodus 24 what we are reading about is a "mass conversion" being performed by*

*Moses...*

*This is total nonsense and an outright lie.*

*First: if a Christian converts to Islam, there are two changes:*

*1) His identity changes from a Christian to a Muslim.*

*2) His God changes from Jesus to Allah*

*These two changes do NOT take place in the events concerning Exodus 24:*

*1) Before Exodus 24, the people were known as either Israelites or Hebrews. After Exodus 24 the people were STILL known as Israelites or Hebrews.*

*2) Before Exodus 24 the people worshiped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. After Exodus 24 the people STILL worshiped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So then: Where is the conversion?"<sup>9</sup>*

The change in name did not take place because the religion and the entire setting itself changed, it was an intra-religious change. One can say that Abraham was the first monotheist together with Noah and that Moses and his people became the first "Biblical Jews" because it was only since Moses that the ten commandments and more extensive religious laws were introduced (Exodus 19:3-6. more extensive laws from Exodus 20 onwards).

To conclude I agree with Dror Ben Ami that there is no prove or any necessity in biblical times to officially convert however there was also no such concept as a "Rabbinic Jew" or Judaism. What I mean to say is that people did not need to convert to Judaism because it did not exist, they only needed to accept the way of the tribe in which they lived (Biblical "Judaism/YHVH ism/Monotheism"). Here again one can take the story of Ruth as an good example. Orthodox Judaism uses this story to prove that there was such a thing as conversion to Rabbinic Judaism although conversion is nowhere mentioned in the text. One could argue that Ruth "converted" to the communal customs. Moreover, I disagree with the entire concept of being born Jewish (Prior to the age of Rabbinic Judaism > originated in the 2nd century. It came from the Jewish Pharisees) because again the notion of Jew never existed as such in biblical times. Additionally, prominent

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<sup>9</sup><http://www.jpost.com/Blogs/Torah-Commentaries/Can-a-Person-Convert-to-Judaism-409549>. Retrieved on 6/5/2016

men such as Judah and King David had a foreign wife's and/or concubine therefore, being born an Israelite went according to the father and not the mother.

## **Meaning of Jewish culture an ambiguous one**

I will not discuss in great detail what Culture is because firstly that is not the purpose of this book and secondly it remains somewhat of an ambiguous concept. However, that being said I think it is useful for the reader to have a notion of a concept of Culture and culture.

Jahoda mentions the definition by Tylor, E. B who came up with the following concept of Culture: "Culture, or civilization...is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, [etc.] and any other capacities acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>10</sup>

It could be argued that any Jewish group was never part of a bigger civilization, however Russian Jews were drafted into the Soviet and Russian army and other Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews interacted with the rest of society through trade and even regular friendships with its non-Jewish counterpart. Jahoda continues and writes the following: "It must be stressed that "culture" is not a thing, but a social construct vaguely referring to a vastly complex set of phenomena. From these one is able to select when building one's own definition—though of course there are constraints."<sup>11</sup>

Of course one could construct a definition of culture to the extent that one's own family adheres to a specific family culture however that kind of culture is not the Culture that I am

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<sup>10</sup> Jahoda, G. (2012). Critical reflections on some recent definitions of "culture". *Culture & Psychology*, 18(3), 290.

<sup>11</sup> Jahoda, G. (2012). Critical reflections on some recent definitions of "culture". *Culture & Psychology*, 18(3), 300.

referring to. I am solely referring to Culture which is, or should be spelling (in my opinion) with a capital C. This is a Culture which contains all sorts of different cultures such as religion, food, clothes, norms, architecture and other such things. And therefore, my claim is that there is no such thing as one Jewish Culture nor even one Jewish culture (non capital C). Because there are many different Jewish traditions, and that they are all fragmented communities. For example, German Jews have a different culture than Polish and Algerian Jews. Even within the group of German Jews there are different religious traditions. For example, people follow different rabbis and different Halacha (Jewish law) which could develop into a different cultures. I have to admit that generally speaking the main principles of Halakha, of for instance German Jews, would be stable. However different rabbis can come up with different interpretations which creates different norms and cultures (what I call sociological-micro cultures). Additionally, Jahoda mentions what I call sociological-micro cultures.

"As Kuper (1999, p. 2) put it in his excellent study: "Everyone is into culture now". In its popular sense "culture" is usually coupled with a range of adjectives to indicate some undefined properties of a category, such as "adolescent culture", "consumer culture", "literary culture", "tabloid culture", "visual culture", and so on. Such ordinary usage is unproblematic; it being understood that "culture" in this sense usually points vaguely to some characteristic ways of behaviour of a category of people. By contrast, social scientists have agonized over this for almost a century, without coming much nearer to an agreed solution."<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, When we look at how Van Beek's defines culture (as mentioned by Knippenberg) we see that she (Van Beek) defines it as the "total of institutionalized values, standards and meanings of a group that inspires and activates the members, provides their common lifestyle and collective identity, and in the long run constructs a tradition, which is not only stabilizing but also often produces rigidity."<sup>13</sup> These concepts were made more concrete through highlighting the expression of culture in four different ways: heroes, myths, rites, rituals, and symbols<sup>14</sup>.

When we apply these cultural values to the Jewish community we would see that every

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Knippenberg, H. (2004). The Maas-Rhine Euroregion: A Laboratory for European Integration?. *Geopolitics*, 9(3), 608-626. p,619

<sup>14</sup>Ibid

specific Orthodox stream has its own rabbis (Heroes). National religious (Dati Leumi) have Rav Kook (Abraham Isaac Kook), Sephardi Jews who came from Morocco have the Baba Sali (Rabbi Israel Abuhaṣeira) and then there is of course certain Hasidim (Breslov Hasidim) whose hero is Rebbe Nachman from Breslov and there are many more of such heroes. These heroes or rabbis adhere to different streams of Judaism and Halacha (Jewish code of Law/Religious laws). therefore, one cannot find one coherent answer to the question who is the hero of the community.

Myths might be more complicated because one could argue for instance that the Golem story is well known throughout different Orthodox Jewish streams however there are different versions of the Golem story throughout different countries. therefore, one could not claim that there is one coherent version of the Golem story or other myths. Overall I see differences and similarities and therefore, further research needs to be done with regard to similarities of Jewish myth's.

The third value, rite, is definitely not the same throughout the Jewish communities, worship and its liturgy are sometimes similar but can also be significantly different from one and other. For instance, a Rambamist would fully prostrate during daily prayer while Ashkenazim would never do this. The Sephardi community says Selichot in the period before the high holidays while Ashkenazim and Hasidim don't. The way one puts Tefillin (phylacteries) on and the kind of Tefillin also greatly differs per community, and conversion (gyur) too is done according to different standards. Ritual in our context has to be connected with rites because all Jewish rituals have a religious source and therefore, are rites.

Finally symbols, The star of David functions as a general symbol for Judaism even in different streams (groups). However, I would suggest that the menorah also has a strong symbolic meaning, therefore, these two symbols are indeed part of Judaism and Jewish culture. However, I did not do a quantitative study about the opinions or rather answers of people with regard to these values. I maintain that it is obvious that most groups have different Rabbi's (Heroes) in their community and that the rites are also significantly different. The value of myth is unclear to me but suggests that there are some differences. Therefore, the only steady value that one could argue are Jewish Symbols. When we take all this into account one can confidently state that there is no such thing as one Jewish Culture or culture.

To conclude this part, one has to know that the notion of "THE" Jews is a myth, they all speak different languages, eat different foods, wear different clothes and come from different ethnic groups. Converting to the "Jewish nation" should be meant in a metaphorical manner rather than in the literal sense. However, it is the Orthodox Jews themselves who proclaim their "one nation people" which is meant metaphysically. Moreover, the majority of Jews is not of Semitic ancestry. The only rational reason why some "Jews" look similar is because in Europe Ashkenazi Jews intermarried which caused their gene pool to become significantly smaller which caused genetic disorders like the Tay-Sachs disease (Ashkenazi disease). Moreover, without new converts coming into the community because of the pogroms they (Ashkenazi Jews) started to gain similar features.

"Only about 30% of the cystic fibrosis chromosomes in the Israeli cystic fibrosis patient populations carry the major CF mutation ( $\Delta F508$ ). Since different Jewish ethnic groups tended to live as closed isolates until recent times, high frequencies of specific mutations are expected among the remainder cystic fibrosis chromosomes of these ethnic groups. Genetic factors appear to influence the severity of the disease"<sup>15</sup>.

There are many different Jewish groups who speak different languages, eat different food (albeit Kosher), wear different clothes and have different halachic authorities and traditions. The only issue that connects these different Jewish groups is that they all adhere to the 613 commandments (in different ways).

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<sup>15</sup> Shoshani, T., Augarten, A., Gazit, E., Bashan, N., Yahav, Y., Rivlin, Y., Kerem, B. (1992). Association of a nonsense mutation (W1282X), the most common mutation in the Ashkenazi Jewish cystic fibrosis patients in Israel, with presentation of severe disease. *The American Journal of Human Genetics* 50(1):222-8 · February 1992.

## The Basics of Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Judaism at this point in time includes denominations such as Modern Orthodox, Haredi and Hasidic. Although some people argue that Hasidic Jews should or could be labeled as 'ultra-Orthodox' I will not label them as such because the term Ultra-Orthodox suggests that the Hasidic Jews are extreme, or at least visibly more extreme than the other two Orthodox groups. This in my opinion is not the case because the Haredim (plural of Haredi) do not differ that much from the Hasidim in their religious observance. One example is the *pyot* (side-locks). One could argue that Hasidic payot are longer however we see in the Haredi and Dati-Leumi societies the same although less often. Modern Orthodox generally do not have long *pyot* however they also refrain shaving with a razor blade (Leviticus 19:27). Moreover, all three groups pray three times a day.

It is true that Hasidim go "beyond" the letter of the law in the sense that they might add meditation outside their prayer and they might even take on the more stringent opinion within Halacha (Jewish law). However, over time we see that Haredim did the same, although they don't emphasize on meditation. The stringency of *Muksa* (on Shabbat) is the concept of prohibition, made by the rabbis, of touching something that could lead to a forbidden action and is applied by Modern Orthodox, Haredi and Hasidic jews. A concrete example is that a pen or pencil are considered *Muksa* because they perform an act of writing which is forbidden on the Shabbat.

Modern Orthodox is often qualified as the more lenient of the three. It is understandable that people perceive it this way however that doesn't mean that they can ignore the laws of the leading rabbi or rabbis of the generation (Gadolei Hador), who are either Haredi or Hasidic. Moreover, the leniencies of local Modern Orthodox rabbis most often occur in cases where there is no Halacha or Mesorah available. One could perceive such a situation as a temporal void of Halacha, which in time will be filled by a communal psak (rule) of a leading rabbi who is Haredi or Hasidic. When this happens it becomes very difficult for a Modern Orthodox rabbi to rule a more lenient opinion than the leading rabbis of the generation. A concrete example is that of the

internet ban which was a call from multiple leading rabbis to ban or filter the internet.<sup>16</sup> The internet used to be an area which was not covered by any leading rabbi and therefore, the Modern Orthodox could easily allow unrestrained use of it. However now that leading figures such as Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef, who is the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel (2014) and Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky order to destroy the smartphones<sup>17</sup> it is impossible for modern Orthodox society to ignore these rulings. If they do ignore the opinion of the Gedolei Hador and proceed with the opinion for an unrestrained access to the internet it could well be that such rabbis will be excommunicated (put into Herem) or declared heretics. However, this did not happen.

The Modern Orthodox community could in theory create a situation in which a schism takes place. However without any Gedolei Hador (Leading Rabbis of the generation) on their side it is the question of what the foundation of their legitimacy is. Abandoning the strongest *mesorah* (transmission of Jewish religious tradition) namely following the leading rabbis (Deuteronomy 17:11) would entail that the movement would lose its claim to Jewish authenticity. At this moment in time I think that the modern Orthodox community is still part of Orthodox Judaism because they do try to follow Orthodox Halacha albeit in leniencies. However the question is for how long they will be tolerated by the Haredi and Hasidic communities who are by far the majority when it comes down to communal *psak din*. Moreover, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik who was a great leading Orthodox Rabbi never became a Gadol Hador because his advocacy of Torah and secular studies. Allegedly Soloveitchik was offered the position of Chief Rabbi of Israel by Prime Minister Ben Gurion but refused this for unknown reasons. This could be because he lacked religious support from the larger Orthodox Community. However that remains speculation<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup><http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/behind-the-scenes-of-the-ultra-orthodox-anti-internet-rally.premium-1.431796> retrieved on 24/7/2015

<sup>17</sup><http://www.timesofisrael.com/chief-rabbi-destroyed-students-iphone/> retrieved on 24/7/2015

<sup>18</sup><http://www.jpost.com/Magazine/Opinion/Then-and-now-311856>

## Jewish Law

Jewish law is dynamic and therefore, actively changing over time through rabbinic additions and interpretations of *halacha* (Jewish law). Generally speaking, *halacha* becomes more stringent over time through rabbinic bodies which create stringencies (chumra(ot)). Deuteronomy 22:8 "parapet around your roof" is being used by the rabbis to support their chumrot, and the power of the rabbis is supported by verse Deuteronomy 17:11 "*Act according to whatever they teach you.*" It creates a situation that places the rabbis on the same level as Gods given word in the Torah, which explains the importance of rabbis in Judaism.

Orthodox Judaism explains it in a different manner. Namely that there are two level of laws, the most important one is Torah law (d'oraita) and the second and lower level is rabbinic Law (d'rabbanan). If the two conflict the Torah law takes precedence over the rabbinic Law. However, the Torah does not mention modern day applications and technology therefore, the rabbis have a free hand in creating new laws on many modern aspects of life. One such example is the rabbinic prohibition of using electricity on Shabbat. Verse Exodus 35:3 "*Do not light a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day*" is being used to support the prohibition of electricity (although electricity is not fire). There are multiple other reasons why electricity is prohibited on Shabbat. One other reason is that turning off a light would cause to *mechabeḥ* (extinguish). All such reasons are only rabbinic interpretations that are scientifically incorrect interpretation of a word just like "extinguish" which only can be used with fire and not electricity. We now see that the rabbis have the supreme authority over issues via verse Deuteronomy 17:11 because the Torah doesn't mention them and therefore, rabbinic law has automatically precedence over Torah law in such situations because the Torah does not cover modern technology and applications. The rabbinic reasoning is as follows; X in modern life is the equivalent of Y in the Torah, although the Torah does not mention X we the rabbinic leaders rule via Deuteronomy 17:11 that X is the equivalent of Y.

The congregation will follow the opinion and ruling of the leading rabbis which means that

it has a spillover effect towards other communities via the Halacha (Jewish law) and the concept of "follow the majority opinion". This Halacha is derived from Exodus 23:2 "follow a multitude" or "follow the crowd." However, when one looks at the entire sentence of the "follow the majority opinion" and realizes that it is taken out of context because the entire verse of Exodus 23:2 states: "*Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd.*" Other sources (Talmud) are only rabbinic<sup>19</sup> and therefore, it seems that the rabbis given themselves *carte blanche* to demand that a law should become the norm as long as it does not directly contradict Torah law like making actual fire on Shabbat. However even for such clear examples there are exceptions such as saving a life.

Moreover, Orthodox Jews have to follow the majority opinion which entails that the norms can shift after each generation; there is Halacha which states minimum requirements however there is no maximum (people can make things more stringent). Moreover, there are still Rabbi's that were born in early twentieth century like Rabbi Ovadia Yosef who established their own halachic work which is based/influenced by previous halachic work. However, it is impossible to base new halacha, like electricity related issues, on halachic ruling from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. therefore, halacha is never static in the sense that there is an absolute law. There is always a different opinion and one can even go "opinion shopping" by different rabbis who all will give you different rulings (depending upon the situation). Moreover, what is considered ultra today can become the standard in five years from now for example the way in which you have to check fruit for bugs. It used to be the case that you open a fruit and see if there is any bug because bugs are not kosher. If there is a bug then you remove it. However, in 2011 the Haredi community in Jerusalem came up with a better way to check for bugs namely through a devise upon which you place the fruit and the light from that devise makes it easier to see if there are any bugs in your fruit. Another example is that figs were not eaten anymore (by some Haredi communities) because they were too difficult to check for bugs (according to the local rabbi X in Jerusalem). What happens in such situations is that a leading rabbi within a community takes on a stringency and that this causes a chain reaction (spillover effect) in which his close followers emulate his behavior. This continues until the

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<sup>19</sup> Talmud Sanhedrin (2a), Chulin (11a) and Baba Metzia (59b)  
Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 18  
#175 of the 248 positive mitzvos in the Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot.  
(the Chofetz Chaim does not include it in his Sefer HaMitzvot HaKatzar)

majority of the community follows the stringent opinion and this becomes the norm. It is true that the reversed can also happen (choosing a leniency). However, this rarely happens, the only time I heard of such an event was when Rabbi Ovadia Yosef tried to bring the non-observant Sephardi community in Israel closer to Orthodox practice. One should not underestimate the power of communal and even local rabbi's because their decisions have a spillover effect. Another good example of a stringency (Khumra) is not touching a pen on Shabbat or other items that are not permitted to use like a phone, laptop and guitar. One is not allowed to touch such items because one might come to use it which is prohibited on Shabbat. The prohibition on Shabbat that is applicable here is called *melakha* which means an act of work<sup>20</sup>. Performing the act of labor is prohibited because the Shabbat should be a rest day. Exodus 31: 12-17:

"(12) And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,(13) Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.(14)Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore,; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: **for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.** (15) Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: **whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.** (16)Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. (17) It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, **and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.**" (Exodus 31: 12-17)

Moreover, such chumrot (stringencies) are derived from Deuteronomy 22:8: "*When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.*" therefore, when one follows Orthodox Jewish dogma it is very important who your rabbi is and to what subgroup you belong to, and where you live because it determines how you will follow and live certain *halacha*. It happens that people are not satisfied with the *halachic* ruling of the leading rabbi and therefore, change their denomination or that they become more *frum* (religious) and choose a more stringent environment.

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<sup>20</sup>Rabbinic explanation

There are also numerous of people within the Orthodox community that leave the community. Some are even asked to leave the community because of their "heretical" views and opinions. This is not a problem if one does not have family living in an Orthodox community however for the people that do have their entire social life in that community it means that leaving is very difficult. Often it is the case that when a member becomes non-religious or sometimes even only less religious, that contact between the family and the individual who left is significantly reduced. Sometimes to the point that all connections with one's relatives are cut-off<sup>21</sup>. Such events generally happen only within Hasidic communities. The modern Orthodox have a tendency to include their non-religious family members however they still perceive it as a negative thing. One might come to think that a person only gets into trouble with the community if one becomes, or is severely less religious. However, this is not the case. One example of a person who got into severe trouble was a fellow student of mine who holds a different view from the majority of Orthodox Judaism. I interviewed him, the source is edited and the English grammar was cleaned up. The identity of this person will not be published because the person who was quoted below adheres at the point of writing to Orthodox Judaism. This means that it could be damaging for him if his name and identity will become known. One can question the validity of these worries, however in this case I do understand the anonymous interviewee.

**Question 1: How much time did you spend in Jewish Orthodox Communities? (Charedi/Dati-leumi/Chasidic)**

**Question 2: what are the problems that you experienced in Orthodox Judaism? (on a practical and dogmatic level)**

Interviewee X:

*"Answer 1: I spent 8 years with Orthodox Jews around me. Both in country X and in Israel*

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<sup>21</sup>[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/21/ex-hasidim-life-stories\\_n\\_7343084.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/21/ex-hasidim-life-stories_n_7343084.html) Retrieved on 9-7-2015

*"Answer 2: My problems are mostly based on the fact that Orthodox Judaism relies heavily on recognized authorities (rabbis and other religious leaders) to the point that the personal opinion or feeling of a believer matters not. Also the unquestionable reliance on tradition always made me wonder if we follow ideas because they are correct and reasonable (even based on Torah texts) or if we follow them just because others followed them in the past."*

**Did you ever show any signs of skepticism towards your community/rabbis? If so, what was their response towards you? If you did not, what reasons did you had to hide your skepticism?**

Interviewee X:

*"My signs of skepticism were met with a welcome by my former chief rabbi of X (place), as long as my skepticism would be placed inside the territories of "research" and not "heresy" My biggest challenge happened when I studied in Israel. After X months of study in a Yeshiva in Jerusalem, I was kicked out by asking too many questions that they felt as antagonism in Judaism. Paradoxically, some years later, I returned to Jerusalem to study in a Haredi Yeshiva at which I stayed for X amount of time. I had many questions there but this time I knew that I had to ask only what is "acceptable" to be asked because I didn't want to get into trouble for misunderstandings. The greatest problem I have with them is that they perceive every deep question as heresy or antagonism to Jewish ideas."*

**Do you think there is a solution or a way out for this problem?**

Interviewee X:

*"I do believe that there is a solution. During the time of the Talmud and the Medieval times, famous rabbis that were experts in the Jewish law were often used their secular knowledge and logic to determine which law should be applied and which mental status should a Jewish person have in his life. therefore, I believe that we again must use science, archeology and logic in order to determine what lifestyle and what mindset would suit us the most in order to be following Judaism as it was always supposed to be, a divinely influenced lifestyle of the nation."*

I don't know how many other people have a similar story, but what I do know is that speaking out

and giving your opinion is problematic when it challenges mainstream Orthodox Judaism. Moreover, I presented the reader with this interview not because I think that he (X) is right in his reasoning and dogma but for the inside that it gives the reader how Orthodox Jewish society deals with individuals such as this Person X, who I would describe as young man of reason. Individuals like person X can only fit into Orthodox society if the community does not perceive them as heretical. Moreover, if it becomes public knowledge that such a critical individual is a potential convert it might be the case that the community will never fully accept them to convert.

## **Kiruv (outreach/to bring closer)**

All of this brings us to the question of what Orthodox society does in order to win back the secular "Jew". Until recently not much was known about the Kiruv (outreach) approach and its organizations. It was always thought that there was such a thing as organized Kiruv. However, details were unknown to the general public. I remember going to the old city in Jerusalem to visit the Western Wall on a Saturday afternoon, and there was this Rabbi M. who invited people to his home for a Shabbat meal. Of course this is a very interesting opportunity for a person who wants to know more about Orthodox Judaism. Therefore, me and a few friends joined, we had a good meal and listened to the rabbi who was talking about Torah, it was all very pleasant and interesting. The meal always ended late, approximately around the time that Shabbat ended and then we used to go back to the Jewish hostel in the Old city (which doesn't exist anymore for men). I never got the impression that the Kiruv (outreach) was highly organized because I believed that those people that invited us were generally very hospitable and that they did not have additional intentions. However later on I discovered that I couldn't have been more wrong in my judgment. Don't get me wrong, I am very grateful to all the people that invited us to their homes for Shabbat, and every person has the right to talk about whatever occupies his or her mind.

However, it is easy for a young person to spend a lot of time in such an environment and to delay his/her University or College. It is relatively easy to stay in that Orthodox environment because at a certain moment they will offer you the possibility to learn more about Judaism in a Yeshiva or Seminary. Initially this happens with words such as "if you are interested in Judaism we can offer you a beginners course for free", or "it's good to learn more about your heritage". It helps that it is free and that the beginner classes are filled with people who are open minded and still go out to town to socialize. However, if you get "stuck" in that situation of indoctrination it limits your options. Of course there are other reasons why people stay in such an environment. One example is that it is socially very pleasant and that it gives people the time to think what to do with their lives. Some people who are there refuse to be indoctrinated and often use it as a sabbatical period in. Others such as me are only interested in the religion, cultures (minor culture)

and philosophy. I always thought that this type of Kiruv was done on an individual and institutional level, not from an entire network of organizations and institutions. The Jewish Professional Institute points out via its website how the Kiruv program works.<sup>22</sup> I will provide the reader with a few quotes to show what kind of mentality they have towards "secular Jews" and how they generally use their Kiruv techniques.

*"Fascinating lectures proving the validity of the Torah, existence of Gd, and the relevance of Judaism to modern life are presented, and more importantly, accepted by many listeners. Enough to convince them to stay on for a few weeks, or months, or years, and even make Aliyah"<sup>23</sup>*  
*"Indeed, at the Kotel, (Western Wall), there is a polished network of outreach professionals who specialize in offering hospitality, and an opportunity to learn Torah, to the previously disinterested Jewish traveler"<sup>24</sup>*

JPI also released a statement of purpose which states that it does not only want to do Kiruv via the public domain but also in the private domain:

*"My specific long term objective is to penetrate these other areas, not covered by synagogues and schools, and cater my educational services to the time frames of the individuals who need it most: The working, studying, or homemaking Jews who don't have the time or inclination to make it to synagogue or school"<sup>25</sup>.*

Orthodox Jews were always known not to proselytize; this is true to the extent that indeed they will not do this if one's mother is not Jewish. However, if one's mother is Jewish or if you are an Orthodox convert to Judaism and you became secular then they will make every effort to pull you back in.

You might ask yourself why is it that kiruv is so important to Orthodox Judaism, and what is the purpose? The answer to this question is that Orthodox dogma proclaims that the soul of all

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<sup>22</sup><http://www.jpi.org>

<sup>23</sup><http://www.jpi.org/kiruv3.htm> Retrieved on 11-7-2015

<sup>24</sup><http://www.jpi.org/kiruv3.htm> Retrieved on 11-7-2015

<sup>25</sup><http://www.jpi.org/purpose.htm> Retrieved on 11-7-2015

the Jews are interconnected and are part of one entity<sup>26</sup>. This means that if one Jew commits a transgression the entire Jewish people will be punished for it. An extreme example of this is the general belief within the Orthodox communities that the Holocaust was indirectly caused by Jews who became secular and liberal. One could argue that such belief is wrong or even sickening.

More educated Orthodox Jews generally do not believe in any correlation between the secularization and the Holocaust. However even they will not argue against the masses that think otherwise. The source in the old testament that ought to support this communal responsibility is Leviticus 26:37 in which it is stated that: "*And they shall fall one upon another*". It is then said that the sages (Chazal) learn from this that Jews are responsible for each other's actions. It is problematic that the sages can learn and derive a meaning or establish a law out of an incomplete sentence from the Torah. The complete sentence as written in the KJV bible is as follows: "*And they shall fall one upon another; as it were before a sword, when none pursueth: and ye shall have no power to stand before your enemies.*" It does not fit in with the topic of an entire community being punished for the actions of an individual. Moreover, the concept of communal responsibility is linked to the concept of *Avrut*, this concept refers to when an *Avera* (sin) is only the responsibility of the community if the sin is public. However, if it is concealed then it is only between the sinner and God<sup>27</sup>. According to the Talmud the concept of *Avrut* has a connection with the biblical source in Deuteronomy 29:29, which states the following"

*"The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever; that we may do all the words of this law. "*

However, the Concept of *Avrut* itself comes directly from the Talmud and can be found in Sanhedrin 43a. There is a lot of controversy around this tractate because it is the censored source that describes the trial and death of a man that is said to be Jesus of Nazareth<sup>28</sup>.

Orthodox dogma does not state that one will be punished for one's ancestor's actions.

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<sup>26</sup>Ohr HaTorah (of the Tzemach Tzedek) Bereshit p. 1962. See also Likutei Sichot vol. 4p.1140.

<sup>27</sup>[http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/892799/jewish/Responsibility%C2%ADfor%C2%A0a%C2%ADFe%20lows%C2%ADReligious%C2%ADObligations.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/892799/jewish/Responsibility%C2%ADfor%C2%A0a%C2%ADFe%20lows%C2%ADReligious%C2%ADObligations.htm). Retrieved 11-8-2015

<sup>28</sup><http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Tyndale/staff/Instone-Brewer/prepub/Sanhedrin%2043a%20censored.pdf>

However what I did often hear from different rabbis is that *mitzvot* (commandments) such as putting on *tefillin* (phylacteries) has a positive effect on one's deceased ancestors who are supposedly in *Olam Haba* (The next world, world to come). To find out more about the subject I presented the following question to a Rabbi: "Dear Rabbi I heard different times from different people that doing mitzvot has a positive effect on one's deceased ancestors. Is this true? If so what is the source?" Rabbi X responded with the following answer: "*Thank you for your important question. Yes, it's certainly true. As one early source for it, see Gemara Sanhedrin (104a) "bera mezakai abba" the son can bring merit for his father*". Additionally, Rabbi X referred to an answer given by Rabbi Y.

from Rabbi Y:

*"If the children and/or students do good deeds or learn for the benefit and welfare of parents' or teachers' souls, it is in essence an extension of their own good deeds that the parents and teachers have done during their lives. They have trained the pupil or child to learn and observe the Torah, to be ethical, respect the elders, etc. Thus, the good deeds are partially at least attributed to the deceased – (source: "Code of Jewish Law" O.C. 132; "Ma'amar Kaddishin" there; O.C. 568:8; "Gesher HaChaim" by R' Y. Tuketchinsky, I 30-2)".*

Additionally, regarding *Kaddish* (hymn for a deceased) Teshuvas Shvus Yaakov claims that in some places a father says *Kaddish* for his deceased son, although this is a minority opinion. However, there is a clear correlation between Judaism ancestral merits in daily prayers as mentioned at the end in the text below. The source of the text comes from a respected Daf Yomi organization and was written on the topic of Sanhedrin 104a.

"Teshuvas Binyamin Ze'ev cites our Gemara to prove that kaddish which is said to elevate the soul of the deceased is exclusively the domain of children.<sup>29</sup>"

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<sup>29</sup><http://www.dafdigest.org/Sanhedrin/Sanhedrin%20104.pdf> retrieved on 19-8-2015

The thought of your dead relative benefiting from your actions is maybe the most outrageous concept to bring people to act in an Orthodox religious manner. However, it seems logical to the extent that when the entire Jewish people and their souls are interconnected that even the deceased are still impacted by the actions of the living. It does not seem logical when one believes in theological free will, which Orthodox Judaism does. Because the soul of the deceased could still be effected by actions of others and this creates a situation in which free will activity such the performance of *mitzvot* (commandment) and *Averot* (sins) during one's life can be added by a living person who does negative or positive actions. Alternatively, the argument could be made that only positive deeds will benefit the soul of the departed family member. However here also one should ask the question why only positive deeds and not negative one's? Rationally all of this does not make sense and it contradicts the concept of free choice and its effect on the soul. Additionally, why is it that the merit from one's ancestors comes from the paternal side? If the Jewish soul is inherited via the mother the merit should be received via the maternal side. One explanation is that it could be the case that men have more obligations in the form of *mitzvot* and that those *mitzvot* are being considered primary merit for the child. But if this is the case then why is the merit of women being placed on a secondary level? It is true that women such as Rachel and Sarah are being perceived as worthy and very respectable. However it remains a male dominated society, a society that consist out of male Talmud students that become prominent members of the community.

In Joshua 7:1 it is stated that God became angered with Israel because of the transgression of one man: "*But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel*". The sentence in Joshua 7:1 suggest at first that all Israelites were unfaithful in one certain aspect (*But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing*). The Second part specifies which Israelite specifically transgressed (*Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing*). However why would God punish all the Israelite tribes for the transgression of one person? To make it more clear one has to ask the question: how could somebody from the tribe of Benjamin be direct responsible for the wrong doings of a member of

another tribe? Moreover, Tribes have different hierarchies and therefore, correction of transgressions could only be done internally. It seems the case that collective punishment or rather "anger" was chosen to pressure the entire group to correct the transgressions. Alternatively, one could read Joshua 7:1 as a specification, that all Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things and that one member of the tribe of Judah was a part of it.

Moreover, the claim that the entire community must suffer because of the transgression of a minority has another source, in Genesis 18:23 the following is written: "*And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*". However, this source is in the form of a question towards God and not an statement. In Genesis 18:26 God answers Abraham's question; "*The LORD said, " And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.*". This conversation between Abraham and God continues until Genesis 18:32 were God says that even if there were ten righteous people he would not destroy "*And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake*". From here we can conclude that the interpretation or myth of the Orthodox community that collective punishment on the entire community is false. However then how do we interpret Joshua 7:1? One could come to interpret Joshua 7:1 as the former interpretation namely that literally all Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things and that one member of the tribe of Judah was a part of it. Why Achan was mentioned specifically remains a big question.

Moreover, from Genesis 18:23-26 one can say that collective punishment does not make sense, and that if we extend the line of its rational, one should also not believe in communal punishment because each positive and therefore, also each negative is upon the individual.

One who lives in an Orthodox community will always experience being corrected by the community if one's opinion or actions are different than the group. *Kiruv* is essentially an attempt that tries to rectify behavior of 'Jews' who do not live according to God's rules. On a practical level this results in *Kiruv* organizations. Generally speaking, the term *Kiruv* is only being used in combination with Secular "Jews" (keep in mind that the term Secular Jews is a contradiction in terms). However, one could also use *Kiruv* to convince someone's partially heretical views wrong, because this would make him/her come closer to God.

## **Orthodox Judaism, its Matriarchy, Matrilineality and who is considered to be a Jew.**

It is well known that somebody a Jew when one's mother is considered a Jew or when one did an Orthodox conversion. I was taught that this was the case because of the verse in Deuteronomy 7:3-4 which states that one will not give his daughter to the foreigner or the foreigners daughter to his son:

(3) Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; **thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.** (4)**For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.**(5) But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire." (Deuteronomy 7:3-4)

When one starts to analyze the text we can ask several questions. The first one is why does Deuteronomy 7:3-4 state not to give one's daughter to their son? If Judaism or "Jewishness" goes via the mother, then what is the problem if she would marry a non-Jewish men because the children would still be considered Jewish. One possible answer is that in a male dominant society during that time would demand to follow the rituals of the husband which could go against Israelite ethics and that therefore, family alliances would be very weak at best and that this would make the chances of tribal survival significantly smaller. Moreover, the sentence "*For they will turn away thy son from following me*" could entail the possibility that a non-Israelite women or rather a foreign women could persuade the Israelite men to live a polytheistic life in which the son would leave the tribe and live with his non Jewish family-in-law. This would weaken the Israelite-Yehawist (YHWH) family because in traditional male dominant society's the women leaves her family in an arranged marriage and not the men.

Prove of patriarchy and patrilineality of "Biblical Judaism" or rather original monotheism/Yehawism/YHWH is that we do not know who the mothers of Abraham, Lot, Lavan (Laban), Rebecca, Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah and Leah are. If there would be any kind of Matriarchy and/or Matrilineality present in its society their names would have been written down.

Moreover, the twelve tribes of Israel, or rather the twelve sons of Jacob (Jacob was given the name Israel in Genesis 32:28-29) should have been the thirteen tribes of Israel if Matriarchy and/or Matrilineality ruled society at that time because Jacob also had a daughter by the name of Dinah. There are more sources that present significant problems for Jewish Orthodox Matriarchy and Matrilineality. One of them is Numbers 27:7 which states "*The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them.*" (KJV). The entire story around Numbers 27:7 presents a situation in which the daughters of Zelophehad initially could not inherit their father's property because apparently only male relatives could do so.

"(1) Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph: and these are the names of his daughters; Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah. (2) And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, (3) Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons.(4)**Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore, a possession among the brethren of our father.** (5) **And Moses brought their cause before the LORD.**(6) **And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,** (7)**The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them.** (8) **And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, if a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter.** (9) And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren. (10) And if he have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father's brethren. (11) And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses." (Numbers

Scripture, Numbers 36:1-13 elaborates on the matter and goes into more detail. Again it presents a case in which the situation of the daughters is only slightly improved. I use the word slightly because they (the women) are still not free to take their inherited goods to another tribe while remaining rightful owners of these inherited goods therefore, the women have to marry within their own tribe (Numbers 36:6).

"(1) And the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near, and spake before Moses, and before the princes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel: (2)**And they said, The LORD commanded my lord to give the land for an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel: and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother unto his daughters.** (3)And if they be married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then shall their inheritance be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and shall be put to the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall it be taken from the lot of our inheritance.(4) **And when the jubile of the children of Israel shall be, then shall their inheritance be put unto the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall their inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.** (5) And Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying, The tribe of the sons of Joseph hath said well. (6) **This is the thing which the LORD doth command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, Let them marry to whom they think best; only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry.** (7) So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. (8) **And every daughter, that possesseth an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers.** (9)Neither shall the inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance.(10) Even as the LORD commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad: (11)For Mahlah, Tirzah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married unto their father's brothers' sons: (12)**And they were married into the families of the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of the family of their father.**(13)These are the commandments and the judgments, which the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses unto the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho." ( Numbers 36:1-13)

Again it is clear that there is no place for any matriarchy and matrilineality in such a society because there are clear indications of strong patriarchy and patrilineality in the text. Moreover, even if there was no strong indication of patriarchy and patrilineality in the text it remains the case that ancient tribes in history were never organized around matriarchy and matrilineality.

Moreover, when we look at Numbers 36:1-13 and Numbers 27:1-11 one could make a connection with Deuteronomy 7:1-6 and especially with Deuteronomy 7:3-4 "*(3)Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.(4)For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.*" (KJV). It is true that this was stated in context of foreign tribes such as the Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites. And the Jebusites. However it could be the case that because these seven tribes were larger than the Israelite tribes "*seven nations greater and mightier than thou*" (Deut 7:1) that the Israelites could not afford the inheritance right of their own women to go to a foreign tribe if she married into a foreign tribe because the foreign tribe could come and collect the inheritance by force. And regarding the son; "*For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods*"

## Prominent Israelite's with foreign women

We will now take a look at prominent Israelite's that had foreign women. This in order to strengthen the case against Matriarchy and Matrilineality within Judaism or rather "Israelite monotheism". Judah in Genesis 38 is the first example, in Genesis 38:1-5 it is described how Judah had relations and children with a Canaanite woman.

"(1) And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. (2) And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuhah; and he took her, and went in unto her. (3) And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er. (4) And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan. (5) And she yet again conceived, and bare a son; and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him. (6) And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar. (7) And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him. (8) And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother. (9) And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. (10) And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also. (11) Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house." (Genesis 38:1-5)

Because I could not even come to think of a counter argument that this was a permitted act on the side of Judah I looked into the Chumash for a possible explanation. The commentary (Rashi) states that the sentence "*And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite*" means "There Judah saw the daughter of a **prominent merchant**"<sup>30</sup>. We can see that the words "*a certain Canaanite*" has been translated into "*a prominent merchant*". However in the biblical Hebrew it is

<sup>30</sup> Scherman, R. N. (1998,2000). The Chumash: The Torah, Haftaros And The Five Megillos With Commentary Anthologized From The Rabbinic Writings. New York: Mesorah Publications. p208-209

spelled *Cnanie* (Canaanite), (בַת אִישׁ כְּנָעֵן, daughter of a Canaanite). Additionally, Zechariah 14:21 has the same problem. The King James Version uses Canaanite (as stated in the original Hebrew) while other (Jewish English) translations use traders (merchants) for the word (Cnanie, Canaanite). Why would one use/interpret the word *Cnanie* (Canaanite), as trader or merchant?

" Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day **there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts.**" (KJV)

וְהִיא כָּל-פָּר בֵּירֹשֶׁלֶם וּבֵיתְיָהוָה קָרְשׁ לִיהְוָה אֲבָזֹת וּבָאָו כָּל-הָזְבָּחִים וְלִקְחוּ מִהָּם וּבְשָׁלוּ בְּהָם וְלֹא-יָהִיל כְּנָעֵן עוֹד בְּבֵיתְיָהְוָה אֲבָזֹת בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא : (Zechariah 14:21)<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, it does not make sense to translate Canaanite (כְּנָעֵן) to merchants or traders. It makes more sense to relate it to Canaanite as a tribe or heritage as mentioned in Deuteronomy 7:1-2 :

"(1)When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, **and hath cast out many nations before thee**, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the **Canaanites**, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou;(2)And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; **thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them.**" ( Deuteronomy 7:1-2 ) KJV

כִּי יְבִיאֶךָ יְהוָה אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-אָתָּה בְּאֶשְׁמָה לְרַשְׂתָּה וּנְשָׁלָגּוּם-רָבִים | מִפְּנֵיךְ קָהָתִי וְהַגָּשִׁי וְהַאֲמֹרִי וְהַכְּנָעֵן וְהַפְּרֹזִי וְהַחוּי וְהַיְבוֹסִי : שְׁבָעָה גּוֹתָם רַבִּים וְעַצְוּם מִלְּךָ ( Deuteronomy 7:1-2)<sup>32</sup>

Orthodox Judaism also uses the Talmud to explain that Judah in Genesis 38:1-5 did not have relations and children from a non-Jewish women (Canaanite) but from daughter of a merchant. In the Talmud (Pesachim 50a) this is also disputed and it is questioned if the word Canaanite should be literally interpreted:

<sup>31</sup><http://www.sefaria.org/Zechariah.14.21?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en> retrieved on 1-8-2016

<sup>32</sup><http://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.7.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=bi> retrieved on 1-8-2016

"(17) And how do we know interdict. A passage describing the death of great scholars, ten in number, is found in the liturgies for the Day of Atonement and the Fast of Ab. Some of the most famous of them were R. Gamaliel, R. Judah b. Baba and R. Akiba. that [kena 'ani] connotes a merchant? — Because it is written, And Judah saw there the daughter of a certain Canaanite [kena'ani]: (18) **what does 'kena'ani' mean? Shall we say, literally a Canaanite:** is it possible that Abraham came and admonished Isaac, Isaac came and admonished Jacob, (19) and then Judah went and married [a Canaanite]! **Rather, said R. Simeon b. Lakish: [It means]** the daughter of a merchant, as it is written, As for the trafficker [kena'an], the balances of deceit are in his hand, (20) Alternatively, I can quote this: Whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers [kin'anehah] are the honourable of the earth (21)"<sup>33</sup> (Pesachim 50a).

In the argumentation that is made one can clearly see that Rabbi Simeon Ben Lakish connects the word "Canaanite" to "kena'an" (from the Hebrew verb *liknot* לִקְנֹת to buy/acquire?). However if this is the case then why does it not make sense when one applies this translation to Deuteronomy 7:1-2 and Zechariah 14:21. Orthodox Judaism would generally answer to this kind of criticism with the most important concept, namely *mesorah* (flawless transmission of religious laws and interpretations to the next generation without change of the laws and traditions). Moreover, this style of reasoning is also typically for the Talmud, it can change meaning of words and interpretations when problems arise.

We now move on to King David who had many wives'. One could argue that all his women were Israelite's however because many are without name and called concubines<sup>34</sup> one can make a safe assumption that these women were acquired during conquests or through other means. Moreover, in 2 Samuel 3:3 it is clearly stated that one of King David's wife's Maacah is the daughter of a foreign king.

"(2) And unto David were sons born in Hebron: and his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelite; (3) And his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third,

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<sup>33</sup><http://www.halakhah.com/pdf/moed/Pesachim.pdf> (English) and  
<http://www.sefaria.org/Pesachim.50a.45?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en> (Hebrew). retrieved on 1-8-2016

<sup>34</sup>. 2 Samuel 15:16.

2 Samuel 16:22.

2 Samuel 20:3.

2 Samuel 5:13

Absalom the son of **Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur;**" (2 Samuel 3:2-3.)

The text in Joshua 13:13 confirms that the Geshur are a foreign people (non-Israelite and non-Judean). Additionally, it appears that there was enough potential for intermarriage with these foreign tribes for the northern tribes and Judeans<sup>35</sup>. "*Nevertheless the children of Israel expelled not the Geshurites, nor the Maachathites: but the Geshurites and the Maachathites dwell among the Israelites until this day.*"(Joshua 13:13.)

The Orthodox arguments against the prohibited relations with these foreign women could be that all the women converted or that they were born Jewish but lived among foreign tribes. The first argument does not seem to be relevant because nowhere it mentioned that one of the many concubines of King David or Solomon actually went through a conversion process. Although Maimonides (Rambam) does make the claim that Solomon's women were converts<sup>36</sup>. The latter argument that they were born "Jewish" could be the case however then why does the text emphasize the foreign nature of the women? Additionally, historically speaking most if not all Kings who married foreign women did not have to worry about the wife's cultural heritage because she would take over the traditions of the king. Unless she convinced him directly or indirectly that her customs were better or an alternative to his.

Additional prove comes from Solomon who also had many foreign wife's as mentioned in 1 Kings 11:1-8. King Solomon started to worship foreign Gods because of the cultural influences of his foreign wife's. When we read the text more carefully we can conclude that God is not angry with Solomon because he has relations with foreign women but because he worshiped foreign Gods (1 Kings 11: 9-10) which presents a link with Deuteronomy 7:3-4. Here one could argue that Deuteronomy 7:3-4 warns men for the potential influence of a women's foreign culture and not as Orthodox Judaism argues for Matriarchy and Matrilineality. Additionally, when Orthodox Judaism claims that these women were converts, then why did they worship idols together with Solomon?

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<sup>35</sup> Finkelstein, I., & Silberman, N. A. (2002). *The Bible unearthes: Archaeology's new vision of ancient Israel and the origin of its sacred texts.* New York: Simon and Schuster. P, 150

<sup>36</sup>Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Issurei Biah 13:16

[http://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh\\_Torah,\\_Forbidden\\_Intercourse.13.16/he/Wikisource\\_Mishneh\\_Torah?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=bi](http://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh_Torah,_Forbidden_Intercourse.13.16/he/Wikisource_Mishneh_Torah?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=bi) Retrieved 5-8-2-16

## Story of Ruth

The story of Ruth is part of the writings in the Tanakh and elaborates on Ruth who came to join the Israelites. Orthodox Judaism on the other hand interprets the story as follows: Ruth came to join the "Jewish" people. However, before she could join the "Jewish" people she was tested on her sincerity (Ruth 1:16) and only then was she accepted. Here one should ask the question where Ruth came from and why did she want to join the Israelite tribes, or according to Orthodox Judaism to join "The Jewish people". In the beginning of Ruth it is explained how she came to the Israelite's:

"(1) Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. (2) And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. (3) **And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons.** (4) **And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.** (5) And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband" (Ruth 1:1-5).

From the text the reader comes to know that the two Moabite women Ruth and Orpah were taken as wife's for the two sons. Moreover, Ruth was a foreigner, a Moabite (or rather a Moabites) who became part of the Israelite's because she married an Israelite man. Orthodox Judaism does not see it this way because according to them Ruth only became part of Israel, "the Jewish people" in Ruth 1:16 after the first husband of Ruth was already dead. When Orthodox Judaism argues that Ruth only converted in Ruth 1:16: "*And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God*", they also have to explain how the Moabite women could have became the women of the two sons of Naomi as "non jews" or rather non

Israelites.

therefore, one can come to the conclusion that Ruth did not convert as a Moabite woman to Israelite Monotheism in Ruth 1:1-5. Additionally, it is very likely that conversion was not even considered because the women would follow the ways of the men (although women could certainly influence their husband's traditions). The other issue here is that the sons of Naomi had Moabite women while in Deuteronomy 23:3 it is clearly stated that such a thing is prohibited: "*An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD forever*". It seems logical that Deuteronomy 23 was written after the writings of Ruth. If not, then one should ask the question whether the Israelite's were aware of Deuteronomy 23 or just did not follow the laws.

Additionally, what is very interesting is that after the husband (or master) of Ruth died she was again single and still considered a foreigner when reading Ruth 2:10: "*Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?*". If she still was considered a stranger, then that could mean that being part of the Israelite tribes depended upon having a connection to an Israelite or Judean men. Otherwise why was she considered a stranger if she was already considered a Israelite women ("Conversion>Jewish soul")? Moreover, Ruth 4:7-12 presents a situation in which Ruth was acquired from Naomi. This only confirms that Israelite society was ruled by men.

**"(7) Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. (8) therefore, the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe. (9) And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. (10) Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day. (11) And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: (12) And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman" (Ruth 4:7-12)**

To conclude this part, I would like to emphasize that nowhere in the writings of Ruth any conversion process of the Moabitess Ruth is proclaimed. Moreover, Ruth who was previously already married to an Israelite was still considered a foreigner to Boaz and his people and this only changed after Boaz acquired Ruth. therefore, the claim of Orthodox Judaism that one should take the story of Ruth as an example that there is such a thing as conversion is false. Additionally, the entire notion of Matriarchy and Matrilineality of the Israelite's does not exist within these texts, one such example is that Boaz takes over what belongs to Elimelech and whatever used to be her sons (Ruth 4:9). therefore, the idea of any Matriarchy and Matrilineality was likely to be invented during Rabbinic Judaism started around 500 B.C<sup>37</sup> and became mainstream during the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

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<sup>37</sup> Neusner, J. (2002). GABRIELE BOCCACCINI'S ROOTS OF RABBINIC JUDAISM. AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY, FROM EZEKIEL TO DANIEL. *Review Of Rabbinic Judaism*, 5(3), 452-464.

## On the word יְהוּד (Yehud or Jehud)

The word Yehud, and Yehuda are only brought in relation to the people from the tribe of Yehuda and the Kingdom of Judah (also spelled Yehudah in English). However Orthodox Judaism claims that the word also refers to Jew as in Judaism. therefore, I will present the reader the origins of the word יְהוּד (Yehud) in order to prove that it is not the case that Yehud refers to a religion or belief system.

<sup>38</sup> אָדִין אֲרִיוֹן בַּהֲתִבְחָלָה הַנּוּל לְנִינָאֵל קָדָם מֶלֶכָא וּכְנוּ אַמְרִילָה דִי-הַשְׁכָמָה  
גָּבְרָ מִזְבְּנִי גָּלוּתָא דִי יְהוּד דִי פְּשָׂרָא לְמֶלֶכָא יְהוּדָעָן

"Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of **Judah**, that will make known unto the king the interpretation." (Daniel 2:25. KJV)

In Daniel 5:13, Daniel 6:14 and Ezra 7:14 the word Jehud is also used in correlation to the kingdom of Judah (Yehuda). Moreover, the use of the word יְהוּדִים (yehudim, plural of yehud) is mentioned by the great commentary of Rashi in Ezra 7:16 in which he states "to examine" the Yehudim<sup>39</sup>. Nowhere the word is Yehud being related to a faith, religion, Dogma or anything metaphysical. therefore, to claim that the word Jehud has any relation to the metaphysical is false when looking at the Tanakh.

Orthodox Judaism brings the argument that all the people of the different tribes were called

<sup>38</sup>[http://www.sefaria.org/Daniel.2.25/he/Tanach\\_with\\_Nikkud?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=bi](http://www.sefaria.org/Daniel.2.25/he/Tanach_with_Nikkud?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=bi) retrieved on 9-8-2016

<sup>39</sup>[http://www.sefaria.org/Rashi\\_on\\_Ezra.7.14.3/he/On\\_Your\\_Way?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en](http://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Ezra.7.14.3/he/On_Your_Way?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en) retrieved on 9-8-2016

Jews (Yehudim). It argues this with the debate that took place in the Talmud (Megillah 13a) in which it stated that a certain man was called Yehuda while coming from the tribe of Benjamin. The question arises how can this be, upon which the answer was given that everybody who is against/refuses idolatry was called a Yehud. The Talmud does not state who this certain man was and in which time period this happened. The latter is not surprising however it is important to know the identity of this man before giving answers to why he was called a Yehud or Yehuda. therefore, to infer that everybody who is against/refuses idolatry was called a yehud is in theory possible but very unlikely because historically people went by their tribe's/family name or birth place (last name). More counter arguments can easily be made, for example if it was the case that this man was a Benjamite while called Yehud it is because people were mistaken about his father's family background. Alternatively it is possible that he was called a Yehud because he left the tribe of Benjamin for Yehuda because of political instability (tribe of Yehuda survived the longest<sup>40</sup>). Another very simple counter argument is that the Talmudic discussion about the man should not bring a concluding answer because not enough details are known to make any derivation on the matter.

Moreover, the entire discussion in Megillah 13a could also be the root of the word Jew/Yehud (religion) as we know it today. Perhaps one could even argue that the notion of the Jewish faith as opposed to a tribal group has its origins in this discussion in the Talmud (200-500 CE) in Megillah 13a.

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<sup>40</sup> Finkelstein, I., & Silberman, N. A. (2002). *The Bible unearths: Archaeology's new vision of ancient Israel and the origin of its sacred texts*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

## The Kuzari

The Kuzari which has five parts was written by Judah Halevi around 1140 CE and is one of the most philosophical and inspiring works produced by Judaism. In the story the foreign king of the Kuzari asks a philosopher, Christian scholar, Islamic doctor and a Rabbi philosophical and theological questions. Each of these people respond differently. Although different scholars argue about its historical relevance it remains a relevant work for Orthodox Judaism because it is studied within the religious framework. The reason why I want to discuss the Kuzari in relation to "Matriarchy and Matrilineality, who is considered a Jew" is because it mentions the conversion (*gyur*) of a foreign people, the Kuzari. This is relevant because it can give us an inside into the process of conversion and way of thinking at the time (by some) about the subject of converts and conversion process in the year 1140 CE. Moreover, Judah Halevi uses the rabbi in the story to present his own views on the Jewish community in Spain and shows his pro Zionide and anti-rationalist inclination<sup>41</sup>. The English translation of the Kuzari that is being used to analyze the book came from a 1905 translation by Hartwig Hirschfeld<sup>42</sup>. Additionally, the word Jew is used to describe somebody with the Mosaic faith.

In part one, verse 27 (Kuzari 1:27) the rabbi (acts as Halevi's voice) makes a remarkable statement, namely that any gentile that joins the "us" (The Jews) shares our good fortune however they are still not equal to us (the Israelites). The explanation why the gentiles that join are still not equal is because the gentiles did not go through the process of Exodus (leaving Egypt). From this sentence it becomes clear that Halevi is not your average scholar and it might be the case that he was a Jewish Israelite supremacist, or born a born Jew supremacist.

It has to be clarified that many great rabbinic scholars like the Rambam (Maimonides) would not agree with such a perception and ideas. However, one should also not minimize such

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<sup>41</sup> Berger, M. S. (1992). Toward a New Understanding of Judah Halevi's "Kuzari" The Journal of Religion, 72(2), 210-228. doi:10.1086/488864

<sup>42</sup> J., & Hirschfeld, H. (1905). Judah Halevi's Kitab al Khazari. London: G. Routledge.

ideas and thoughts because it could be the case that Judah Halevi was an example of the type of the Jews that moved to Israel at that time. Additionally, it has to be stated that Judah Halevi was not a rabbi and only seemed to have become more zealous later in his life. A counter argument would be that Yehuda Halevi talked about a Ger Toshav (Foreigner who lives in Israel as a Noahide) and not a Ger Tzedek (Jewish convert who keeps all 613 Mosaic laws). However, the text clearly states "any Gentile who joins us unconditionally". To join the Jewish People (according to Orthodox Judaism) can only be done through conversion and keeping Shabbat and the 613 mitzvot. This is something the Ger Toshav is not allowed to do. Moreover, a righteous Noahide is not allowed to marry a Jewish woman. Additionally, if the text would mean a Ger Toshav then it could have said something like any Gentile that lives among us or besides us and that doesn't keep the Mosaic laws.

"(27). The Rabbi: Yes; **but any Gentile who joins us unconditionally shares our good fortune, without, however, being quite equal to us.** If the Law were binding on us only because God created us, the white and the black man would be equal, since He created them all. **But the Law was given to us because He led us out of Egypt, and remained attached to us, because we are the pick of mankind.**" (Kuzari 1:27 Sefaria<sup>43</sup>).

You might ask the question why Kuzari 1:27 is relevant to our topic. The relevance of it is that the notion of convert (ger) is not always perceived the same as a born Jew. This could be because apparently the Exodus out of Egypt was not created for the *ger* but only for the Israelites (according to Halevi). Moreover, because the sentence says "joins us" in addition to the religious context of the story (Christian, Muslim, Jew) one can come to the conclusion that it meant Jewish religion as opposed to Jewish nation. therefore, Judaism around 1140 could have been considered as "only" a religion and not one ethnic group by at least Judah Halevi. However, in Kuzari 1:95 he states "For me it is sufficient that God chose them as His people from all nations of the world, and allowed His influence to rest on all of them, and that they nearly approached being addressed by Him". When reading 1:95 one can conclude that the Israelite nation became a chosen monotheistic (Jewish) nation.

Orthodox Judaism claims that there is a Jewish nation (metaphysical nation) however a Jew does

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<sup>43</sup> [http://www.sefaria.org/Sefer\\_Kuzari.1.33?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=bi](http://www.sefaria.org/Sefer_Kuzari.1.33?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=bi) retrieved on 9-8-2016.

not have to be an Israelite. While according to Kuzari 1:27 a chosen monotheistic Israelite (born Jew) is on a higher level than a "chosen" monotheistic foreigner (convert) because of the Exodus experience. The most important part is that when looking at the statement made on Kuzari 1:27 it seems to be the case that Judah Halevi thinks that a born Jew stand on a higher level than the convert.

Kuzari 1:92 (Hirschfeld, H. 1905) describes how the Kuzari king tells the rabbi that he is too hasty with the description of the superiority of his people. Because did they not worship the golden calf (Exodus 32) and were they not disobedient? Upon which the Rabbi answered (1:93) that therefore, the sin was even more severe because his people were so great. The rabbi in the story starts to elaborate in 1:95 how God chose his people and how, until Moses, it happened in a selective manner.

When analyzing the text one can come to the conclusion that according to Judah Halevi there were no chosen group of people prior to the giving of the Torah to Moses at mount Sinai because prior to this event it was God that decided on an individual selective manner who was a chosen person, and who was not. This means that what Orthodox Judaism calls "retroactively Jewish" such as Abraham, Sarah, Jacob and Isaac, etc are Jews because God chose them individually. This view complies with contemporary Orthodox explanation in the sense that they perceive not all the offspring of Abraham and Isaac as "their offspring". Additionally, Kuzari 1:95 recognizes the role of the prophetess, however in the text there is still a very strong emphasis on the male gender and roles.

In Kuzari part two (Kuzari 2:1) the conversion of the Kuzari king is explained. At this point of the story the Kuzari king is informed enough to know about the basics of Judaism. Additionally, prior to the conversion in Kuzari 2:1 the rabbi in the story repeats that Israelites stand on a higher level than converts:

"God allows him who treads this path, as well as his progeny, to approach Him very closely. Those, **however, who become Jews do not take equal rank with born Israelites, who are specially privileged to attain to prophecy**, whilst the former can only achieve something by learning from them, and can only become pious and learned, but never prophets." (Kuzari 1:115)

Moreover, circumcision is mentioned in the text of the conversion process and Jews that witness the conversion. All these events are also present in contemporary Orthodox Judaism when converting. The only thing that is questionable is that contemporary Judaism would never convert somebody if he is married to a non-Jewish women, because of Matrilineality of the Jewish soul. It is true that we don't know if the Kuzari king was married however one could assume that he at least had sexual relations. According to Orthodox Jewish law a man is not allowed to have relation with a non-Jewish woman (Deuteronomy 7:3-4. see also first discussion).

"The king and his Vezier traveled to the deserted mountains on the sea shore, and arrived one night at the cave in which some Jews used to celebrate the Sabbath. They disclosed their identity to them, embraced their religion, were circumcised in the cave, and then returned to their country, eager to learn the Jewish law. They kept their conversion secret, however, until they found an opportunity of disclosing the fact gradually to a few of their special friends. When the number had increased, they made the affair public, and induced the rest of the Khazars to embrace the Jewish faith." (Kuzari 2:1)

Alternatively, one can make the argument that because all the Kuzari eventually converted to Judaism it included their wives.

To conclude it is clear that at least one prominent Jew ( Judah Halevi) around 1140 CE thought that born Jews were superior to converts because the born Jew comes from a family line which experienced the Exodus out of Egypt. Moreover, Judah Halevi thought that the event of the Exodus out of Egypt was specially created for the Israelites and not for any foreign convert (Kuzari 1:27). Additionally, in Kuzari 1:115, Judah Halevi affirms again the superiority of the born Israelites (Jews) although from here it seems the case that he uses the term Jew synonymously , but not exclusively with the term Israelite. This would mean that he perceived Israelites as Superior Jews and converts (*gerim*) as inferior Jews. therefore, it is not strange that contemporary converts to Orthodox Judaism find it difficult to find a born Jewish husband or wife.

Contemporary mainstream Orthodox Judaism would not allow conversion of a person if he has or she has a non-Jewish husband or wife. Although the text does not mention that the King has a wife, one could assume that he had sexual relations. Moreover, there arises halachic problems when conversion is kept private. For example, food (*Kashrut*) that the servant brings, or issues

with regard to modesty (*Tsniut*). therefore, the "conversion" of the Israelite people when the elders accepted the Torah was done in one instance<sup>44</sup> and not gradually. The main difference with contemporary Orthodox Judaism is that the conversion process is far more difficult and the notion of superiority of born Jews is significantly less often expressed. However, the latter depends up on each orthodox community. Hasidic communities have the tendency not to marry their children to converts. However, this does not have to be related to the "superiority" of the born Jew and because of the Exodus experience of the Israelites.

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<sup>44</sup>Exodus 19

# Talmud Bavli and Halacha: The issues regarding its claimed objective ruling and infallible Mesorah.

This chapter will cover the \*Talmud<sup>45</sup>, halacha, mesorah and how the "unbroken" tradition from Moses seems often very broken. To give a quick review I will first describe the subject at hand, just in case the reader forgot or skipped the first part of this book.

The Talmud is also called the oral law because it used to be the case that the Talmud was only passed on through verbal communications. The idea behind it was that if somebody in the community would make a mistake by reciting the law incorrectly that the community would correct that person. The Talmud (Mishna part) was written down on the orders of Judah the Prince (Judah HaNasi) around 200 CE. Moreover, the Talmud consists out of two parts. The Mishna (200 CE) and the Gemara which consists out of rabbinic analysis of the Mishna (500 CE).

Halacha is the Jewish law that is derived from Talmudic debates between rabbis. There is a majority and minority opinion in the Talmud, and therefore, one can still be a non-heretic (kofer) if one at least follows the minority opinion. However, the majority opinion is very important within Orthodox Judaism because it is claimed to have its roots in the Torah (Pentateuch):

*"Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment"* (Exodus 23:2). A decision by a rabbinic court is made by three judges this in order to come to a verdict and have a majority opinion under Exodus 23:2.

Different denominations of Orthodox Judaism follow different halachic rulings and this can cause contradicting opinions and norms. The concept of minhag (custom) is related to our

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<sup>45</sup>All \*Talmud sources come from the English translation [www.halakhah.com](http://www.halakhah.com) (Rabbi Dr.Tzvee Zahavy, donate button leads to paypal: [zahavy@gmail.com](mailto:zahavy@gmail.com)) and are double checked with the Hebrew on <http://www.sefaria.org/Chullin.105a?lang=en> unless noted differently. People that argue this is not a proper translation of the Talmud do not know of Rabbi Dr.Tzvee Zahavy accomplishments and credibility. More sources from Rabbi Dr.Tzvee Zahavy can be found via <https://sites.google.com/site/drtzveezahavy/> and <https://www.amazon.com/Tzvee-Zahavy/e/B001HOR8DU/>. Additionally, the context of the Talmud discussions were verified eith the following source: Weinbach, M. (2001).The weekly daf: Insights and lessons on Daf Yomi selections. Targum Press.

topic because it is the minhag that is the set norm or the existing majority opinion of a community. If one changes communities, especially denominations, within Orthodox Judaism it could be the case that a person has to adhere to different norms. The stringent and lenient option within a certain halachic ruling of a certain rabbi can give the Orthodox Jew a "way out" or rather a loophole. People can go "opinion shopping" if they are not satisfied with the current opinion. However, this is often looked down upon by any non-modern Orthodox Jew. One example is that some young modern Orthodox couples use birth control. The prohibited against this is stated in Genesis 38:9 and in Genesis 1:28. Their reasoning why to use birth control is often because of their financial situation. However generally speaking, your local Orthodox rabbi will not and cannot give an exemption on Genesis 38:9 and in Genesis 1:28. Unless one becomes really creative with halachic opinions and interpretations of halacha and scripture. One possible reasoning that a rabbi could give a young couple an exemption is if he seriously thinks that the couple might lose their connection with Orthodox Judaism in its entirety.

A minhag (custom) in a community develops over time. Often in a more stringent manner unless the entire congregation is lenient in which a more stringent rabbi could lose his position. One often sees that the country or state in which a Jewish community is settled has an impact on the Jewish religiosity and minhag. For example, there are countries in Europe that are pro-gay or at least accept gay relations. The Jews in these countries often don't want a chief rabbi that is openly anti-gay.

A minhag can be to wait only one hour between meat and milk ("liberal" Orthodox Dutch Ashkenazi minhag), three hours, or even six hours. therefore, the minhag, is derived from the Talmud (selectively),

Moreover, I often heard people say "it is only/just a minhag, not halacha." However, where do such people think the minhag comes from? A minhag is adopted at some point in time and is often derived from the Talmud (or at least an interpretation of the Talmudic source), which is the legal interpretation of the Torah. Only then the halacha is created by different rabbis. There are minhagim that are not related to Talmudic discussion and here one could argue that it is "only" a minhag. However, who established that minhag in the community? It must be a rabbi, and because people will generally follow the rabbis example it becomes an Exodus 23:2 argument. Namely that one should follow the majority opinion. Additionally, in Pirkei Avot 1:6 it states to make yourself

a teacher. Orthodox Judaism explains this as that you should have a rabbi that you will follow. therefore, if one argues that it is "just" a minhag one would violate the concept mentioned in Pirkei Avot 1:6 and Exodus 23:2 if one does not follow that minhag.

## **Talmud, Torah, Halacha and Minhag in the world of Kashrut**

For our first example we will have a more detailed look at Chullin 105a (Talmud) and the prohibition of mixing meat with milk under Orthodox law. The *machloket* (dispute) is between Beth Shammai who argues that one must clean (one's mouth) and not rinse it. And Beth Hillel who argues that one must rinse (the mouth) and not clean it. The discussions present rabbi Zeyra, and continuous the argument, the details thereof are not important because we try to focus on the different opinions, halacha and mesorah. The conclusion of the discussion is that the law is to clean (the mouth) with anything except flour, vegetables and dates.

The next discussion in Chullin 105a regarding mixing milk and meat is started by rabbi Assi who asks to rabbi Jochanan the question: how long must one wait between meat and cheese? He (R.Jochanan) replied "nothing at all", upon which R.Assi replies that this can certainly not be the case because rabbi Hisda stated "*if a person ate flesh he is forbidden to eat (after it) cheese, if he ate cheese he is permitted to eat (after it) flesh*". They continue the argument and now asks how long must one wait between cheese and flesh? And he replied "nothing at all".

This might be confusing for the reader because there is clearly some restriction, then how is it possible that R. Jochanan states that there is no waiting time between cheese and flesh and vice versa? Comes R Hisda who clarifies that if a person ate flesh that he is forbidden to eat (after

it) cheese, if he ate cheese he is permitted to eat after it flesh. The discussion goes on in detail and different customs (minhagim) are stated, from waiting one entire meat meal until eating cheese until longer. It has to be noted that none of the detailed conversations mention any clear hourly framework which could be compared to contemporary Orthodox Jewish meat-mild Kashrut laws (1,3,6 hours). The outcome remains inconclusive however it is clear that there needs to be a break in between meat and cheese according to R. Hisda. However one only has to clean one's mouth with anything except flour, vegetables and dates (Beth Shammai vs Beth Hillel outcome Chullin 105a).

The statements made by Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel are the most basic and easiest to follow in halachic terms. The second opinion, R. Jochanan is highly questioned by R. Assi because according to him ( R. Jochanan) there is no need for a waiting period between meat and milk or visa-versa. The third opinion made by R Hisda is that no cheese after meat but one can eat meat after cheese. This is already more stringent.

The first question is, if these laws follow the infallible, unchanged mesorah which originates from Moses (me Sinai) then how are these discussions even possible? Why do we have in total more than five different opinions? The Orthodox way to counter such questions is to claim that all of them are correct, and that they are "merely" different opinions. First I will cover the root source of the halachic prohibition of mixing meat and milk:

"(14) Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. (15) Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:) (16) And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labors, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field. (17) Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD. (18) Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread; neither shall the fat of my sacrifice remain until the morning. (19) **The first of the first fruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.**" (Exodus 23:14-19.)

From the context one is able to know when the prohibition of mixing a kid in the mother's milk is applicable. And because the entire story around Exodus 23:19 is related to the sacrifice as it mentions "*thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God*" and feasts, one cannot automatically infer that it is also applicable during private consumption of meat and milk. Moreover, even if one would infer that it is also applicable for private consumption and not only for the use of the house of the Lord, it states "**Kid in the mother's milk**" and not meat in any milk of any cow. The counter argument from Orthodox Judaism against the latter argument is that since we do not know from which cow the milk and meat comes from one should refrain using it all together to be on the safe side. However, the original argument that it is only related to the three festivals for the house of the Lord and not private consumption is ignored by Orthodox Judaism. Moreover, the entire sentence states "**Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk**", in which seethe is old English for boiling/cooking. therefore, according the literal interpretation of the text one is only prohibited to boil the meat of the calves, of the mother cow, into her own (mother) milk. The reason behind the re-interpretation by Orthodox Judaism is that this is the Mesorah and the way "Jews" always interpreted it (according to Orthodoxy). One can see here again the selective and adjusted interpretation of scripture by Orthodox Judaism. Taking one sentence out of context in order to establish a law is very common, it also proves the ability of rabbinic Judaism to be not only creative with halacha but also with the interpretation of the Torah itself.

The Talmud does not have one clear answer to the question in which manner to wait and how long to wait between meat and milk and milk and meat. Orthodox Judaism claims that having multiple opinions in the Talmud and/or halacha does not mean that it contradicts each other. They claim that all sides can be correct. For example, the one who holds one, three or six hours are all correct because there is such a Talmudic opinion (which is also an interpretation). Here comes the problem with the concept of being objectively correct, namely that there is no such thing in Orthodox Judaisms. There are many opinions that are considered correct and this is often conceived as the "beauty" of halacha. However, when one uses philosophy and starts to think critically on the matter then there will arise multiple question. For Example, If I hold six hours between meat and milk and then suddenly I eat or drink a milk product (Chalavi) after an hour, does that mean that I broke the rabbinic Kashrut laws? If one claims no because Beth Shammai, Beth Hillel and R. Jochanan would allow it then why do we have those six hours in the first place? Just another

rabbinic stringency (chumra) which has its source in Deuteronomy 22:8? which becomes a Torah law through "listen to the rabbi" in Deuteronomy 17:10: "*And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee*".

Moreover, converts can choose their own minhag even if their father is Jewish (minhag goes via father). therefore, it is possible to choose the most "profitable" minhag per situation, this means that the issue of Kashrut depends upon minhag which depends upon the mindset of the individual. To summarize, the intention of the individual determines if one commits a sin (avera, chet) and only if one conceives it as such. Of course this example is only relevant during certain Kashrut situations because pig is not kosher by any minhag. However, it illustrates the problems of multiple "correct" halachic interpretations that contradict each other, and not only in Kashrut also the laws of modesty (tzniut).

The problem of the "infallible" mesorah comes into the discussion when the mesorah is clearly not infallible. Because why is it that all these rabbis in the Talmud have different opinions if the mesorah is unbroken since the times of Moses at Mount Sinai? What would Moses himself do? Only washing his mouth and no waiting time or wait six hours? However, if you are an "Aish Halacha" as described in Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's book Halakhic Man then you find all of this marvelous and amazing.

*"Our Torah does not contain even one superfluous word or phrase. Each letter alludes to basic principles of Torah law, each word to well-fastened, authoritative, everlasting halakhot."*<sup>46</sup>

Let's now look closer at contemporary Orthodox Judaism and its use of Chullin 105a,115a, 115b on multiple halachic levels. As mentioned before there are three main halachic minhagim to wait between meat and milk (1, 3 and 6 hours). The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 46:9<sup>47</sup> writes that a person should wait six hours between meat and milk. There are a number of halachic opinions which hold less than six hours and a variation on what to do before consuming milk. For example, there are some opinions that require rinsing the mouth. Dutch Ashkenazi Jews keep one hour and

<sup>46</sup> Soloveitchik, J. D. (1983).Halakhic man. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America. p,100.

<sup>47</sup> [http://www.sefaria.org/Kitzur\\_Shulchan\\_Aruch.46.9?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en](http://www.sefaria.org/Kitzur_Shulchan_Aruch.46.9?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en)

some keep three<sup>48</sup>. Overall there are enough opinions to support one's claim of a certain kosher meat-milk lifestyle and to follow at least the minority opinion which excludes one from being a heretic (kofer).

Another example is the Kosher laws of insects and rodents (Sheretz). There is a Torah prohibition to eat animals from the ground that creep such as worms and flying insects (Leviticus 11). therefore, Orthodox Judaism stresses the need to check one's fruit for bugs, especially figs are problematic. The Posek (decider of Jewish law) at my Haredi Yeshiva and its neighborhood decided that one should not even eat figs because there are many microscopic bugs in the fruit. Such an approach is very extreme in my opinion and therefore, if one claims that Hasidim are Ultra-Orthodox Jews then one can easily claim the same for Haredim. One certain type of insect that is permitted to eat is a particular kind of locust which is mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch<sup>49</sup>:

"(1) Kosher signs for locusts: All that have four legs and four wings, and its wings cover most of the length and circumference, and has two legs to jump with, even if it doesn't have now, but is destined to grow them after a time. And even if it has all these signs, it is not permitted unless its name is "chagav", or they have a tradition that its name is "chagav."<sup>50</sup> (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah. 85.1)

These days the Ashkenazi community lost (if they even had it in the first place) the tradition (mesorah) of which locust this exactly is. therefore, no Ashkenazi Jew will consider any locust to be kosher. However certain Sephardic communities<sup>51\*52</sup> such as the Yemenite Jews maintained the tradition of which locust this kosher "Chagav" is. therefore, the hypothetical situation could arise that Ashkenazi Jews are invited to a Yemenite or Sephardi Shabbat meal and would consider the food at the table not Kosher for themselves. Here again there is a subjective notion of Kashrut, namely person Z considers X kosher while person Y would violate one of the 613 commandments if he or she would eat product X (Deuteronomy 14:1-21 and Leviticus 11, kashrut laws).

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<sup>48</sup> Forst, B. (1993). *The laws of kashrus: A comprehensive exposition of their underlying concepts and applications.* Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications. P,100-101

<sup>49</sup> Shulchan Aruch. Yoreh Deah. 85.1

<sup>50</sup>[http://www.sefaria.org/Shulchan\\_Arukha,\\_Yoreh\\_De'ah.85.1?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en](http://www.sefaria.org/Shulchan_Arukha,_Yoreh_De'ah.85.1?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en)

<sup>51</sup> Forst, B. (1993). *The laws of kashrus: A comprehensive exposition of their underlying concepts and applications.* Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications. P,39

<sup>52</sup>Rather a Mizrachi community because Yemen is on the east side and not linked to Sephardi (Spanish)

One could make the argument that if in one Jewish community there is a tradition to eat this special kind of locust the entire Jewish community should accept it as Kosher. However here we see that the different Jewish communities are really separated in their historical, halachic and mesoric experience. And although Rashi (Leviticus 11.21, Tur 85, citing Rosh, Taz 85:1<sup>53</sup>) states that if one visits a community that has the tradition to eat the locust, it is permissible to eat it as well. However when one looks at the behavior of Orthodox groups it is very difficult to believe that the visitor will really follow Rashi's opinion because they (Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews) attach a lot of value to their own minhagim and mesorah (tradition).

Additionally, one might come to think that the laws of Kashrut are very much oriented to a total restriction of pork and other non-kosher products. However, this is not the case because there is the concept of *Bitul BeRov* (Nullification in a majority case). The *Bitul BeRov* concept explains that when two similar foods are mixed, the non-kosher food may become *batel* (nullified) in a simple majority of kosher food (even if the non-kosher food is intact, however unrecognizable)<sup>54</sup>. Chazal (the sages) derive the concept *Bitul BeRov* from scripture in Exodus 23:2: "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment". Again there is no direct connection with to scripture that covers the topic of justice. Other opinions such as the *Rishonim* disagree with Chazal (Sages) about the source.

The discussion with regard to nullification is far more complex and detailed than described above. However, one does not need to know all the specific details to come to the conclusion that it is possible to nullify non-kosher food. There are many exception or rather specification in which it is not possible to nullify, such as hot non-kosher food that influences the taste of the kosher food even if it is *Bitul BeRov*. The entire concept of nullification is strange when one thinks about the Torah prohibition on forbidden foods as mentioned in Leviticus 11. How could the rabbis *pasken* (make a halachic ruling) that it is permitted without having a clear source for it in the scripture? Not only that, it is also the case that the different *Rishonim* have totally different opinions on the source of *Bitul BeRov*. Why uphold such a strange concept, isn't it easier to forbid any product that

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<sup>53</sup>Forst, B. (1993). *The laws of kashrus: A comprehensive exposition of their underlying concepts and applications.* Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications

<sup>54</sup>Ibid, p53

has non-kosher substance or any such non-kosher remnants in it? The metaphysical aspect is also strange because how does one explain that non-kosher food has a negative influence on the soul while if it is nullified it does not have any negative impact on the soul. The general Orthodox Jewish answer is that once it is nullified it is considered as if, or like kosher food. However why is it impossible to make a convincing argument for nullification (LeBatel) with any source in the Torah? The classic argument out of this is that it is the unchanged *mesorah* that dates back to Moses at mount Sinai, or that it is an old *minhag* (custom). The best way out for rabbinic Judaism (contemporary Judaism) is through "you shall listen to the rabbi" in Deuteronomy 17:10: "*And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee*".

### **Talmud Bavli (Seder Moed), Pesachim 66a, Sukkah 9a**

In Pesachim 66a the Mishna states that the heads of the Sanhedrin were not certain if the sacrifices could be made because of the Shabbat. The Gemara states that "our rabbi's" taught that this halacha was hidden from [forgotten] by the Bene Bathya (children of Bathya). And that on one occasion the fourteenth (of Nissan) fell on the Shabbat, and they forgot and they were uncertain if the Korban Pesach overrides Shabbat or not. It is stated that one person who just moved from Bavel, his name is Hillel the Babylonian, knows if Pesach overrides Shabbat or not. The Talmud continues by stating that the people asked Hillel the Babylonian questions relating Pesach (Passover), after answering they appointed him as Nasi (leader/ruler/master) and he lectured the community the entire day. The Talmud then discusses how Hillel began to rebuke his congregation. Then the following question was asked to him: "Master, what if a man forgot and did not bring a knife on the eve of Shabbat?" Hillel replies with the words: "I have heard this law, but I have forgotten it, but leave it to Israel, if they are not prophets, yet they are children of prophets". On the Following day during an incident that took place (see Talmud) Hillel suddenly recollected the halacha and said: "Thus I have received the tradition from the mouth of Shemaiah and Abtalyon."

(recalls the law on the spot).

The significance of Pesachim 66a is that Orthodox Judaism strongly believes in the infallible and unchanged mesorah. However, when one analyzes the text one can see that it is even stated that communities at the time did not remember what the law (halacha) was like. Moreover, a great Torah scholar like Hillel the Babylonian was not even sure until the day that the halachic decision (psak din) had to be taken. One can claim that Hillel's sudden recollection of the halacha was very convenient. therefore, there is a significant possibility that Hillel decided the halacha on the spot.

## **The Concept of Agadah, and the problems that come with it**

The aggadah can be found in the Talmud, however there is not one specific place where the aggadic writings can be found. The question therefore, is when does one know that one is dealing with such a aggadic literature? The answer is that it should be clear to the reader because the story does not deal with halacha. One can perceive it as a parable that, according to Orthodox Judaism, has multiple layers of truth. therefore, the question arises why such literature is in the Talmud. Is the Talmud not a codex of Jewish law? Is its job not to debate halacha? Well, one would certainly think so, however there are a few places within the Talmud where the halachic and aggadic part of the Talmud merges together (Bava Kama 60a)<sup>55</sup>.

For the reform/liberal Jew such texts can be a source of inspiration, because it is open to interpretation by anyone. Orthodox Judaism on the other hand should ask itself the question what the aggadah is doing in the midst of halacha that are claimed to be true, "objective" and unchanged

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<sup>55</sup> Solomon, N. (2009).The Talmud: A selection. London: Penguin Books. P,440

(mesorah). Should it not have been placed in a separate book because one could mistake it for halacha? It is true that most of the times it is clear to the reader if it is a aggadic piece of literature, however it can also merge as mentioned before.

I remember that one time during our Gemara class the rabbi wanted to give us a different taste of the Talmud and decided to cover the story of the Leviathan (Bava Batra 74a-75a). He asked the question what it could mean. On purpose I stated a ridiculous and foolish answer, namely that this text come to teach us to not to study too hard (10-12 hours a day) and to relax from time to time because the Leviathan symbolizes fatigue. Obviously the rabbi disagreed with my interpretation. I stated such a "ridiculous" answer because one is not able to argue that an aggadic text means either this or that. It is open to interpretation, of course with limits. For example, the text could not insinuate to act against and violate Torah norms and mitzvot. However, the answer that I gave to the rabbi cannot be invalidated because there is no valid answer, and one should argue that it is empirically meaningless for this reason. A few weeks after this incident, or rather my "foolish" remark I was moved to another Gemara class without being notified. The Orthodox yeshiva system (especially Haredi and Hasidic) does not like students who make statements that go contra Orthodox dogma and that cannot be proven wrong. Even within the aggadic text there are limits to which one can interpret such text. Let's return to the core of this chapter and not dwell too much on my own personal experiences.

The story of the Leviathan that I will cover is stated in Talmud Bavli, Baba Batra 74a-75a<sup>56</sup>. The Leviathan is also mentioned in detail in the Tanakh (Job 41: 1-34). In Baba Batra 74a it discusses first other issues such as Mount Sinai that was surrounded by scorpions and an statement saying "*I will show you where heaven and earth touch one another*". Then without direct connection Rabbi Johanan relates this to the story of the Leviathan. R. Jochanan recalls that once upon a time he and another person traveled on board of a ship. "*They saw a fish raised his head out of the sea. Its eyes were like two moons, and water streamed from its two nostrils as from the two rivers of Sura*". Then Rabbi Safra states: "Once we traveled on board of a ship and we saw a fish that raised its head out of the sea. It had horns on which was engraved: "I am a minor creature

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<sup>56</sup>Only verified with the sources of Rabbi Dr.Tzvee Zahavy Talmud and Sefaria, NOT with Weinbach, M. (2001).The weekly daf: Insights and lessons on Daf Yomi selections. Targum Press.

of the sea, I am three hundred parasangs (length) and I am going into the mouth of the Leviathan". R.Ashi said: it was a sea goat which searches for food and for that purpose has horns". Such statements about the sea creature continue until Baba Batra 75b.

Why is it that R.Ashi states what the sea creature exactly is, namely a sea goat. Moreover, from where do these stories come from? In Orthodox Judaism it is not important to know when and how these tales and myths of strange creatures were developed and where they came from. They accept the text merely because it is stated in the Talmud. Additionally, when one is reading the aggadic text on Baba Batra 74a it seems the case that they are lose parts that were randomly added into the Talmud. This could be the case because the concept of aggadah and halacha are incompatible. One could consider the aggadic text a snack/feast when compared to the "dry" and detailed halachic discussions. Maybe this was exactly its purpose.

Overall, mixing halachic text with anything related to parables and myth jeopardizes the credibility of the former. Moreover, if Orthodox Judaism would claim that the aggadah is also part of the mesorah that goes back to Moses at Mount Sinai then they need to explain where Moses saw/experienced that Leviathan. The counter argument is that the Leviathan is only a metaphor and therefore, Moses could have seen the Leviathan on land (whatever the "Leviathan" is). However then where does the mentioning of the sea come from? Because It is described as a sea creature. Additionally, if Orthodox Judaism would argue that the aggadic text is not part of the mesorah then why is it stated in the Talmud? However, such questions are not asked in Orthodox (rabbinic) Judaism because the argument is that one has to follow the rabbis and the sages. If one tries to question concepts that were stated by an important rabbi one will be encountered with the statement: "who are you to doubt and question the sages (Chazal)".

One other answer I personally received was that the prove that the oral law (Talmud) is correct and infallible comes from the fact that Orthodox Judaism uses *tefillin* (phylacteries). The exact reasoning was that the Torah mentions *tefillin* and we need the oral law to describe what this is and looks like because it is not mentioned in the Torah. It is indeed the case that the sources in the Torah<sup>57</sup> don't mention the *tefillin* and that one needs the Talmud to explain it<sup>58</sup>. However how does this explain that the oral law is correct and that Orthodox Rabbinic Judaism is the "correct"

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<sup>57</sup> Exodus 13:9, Exodus 13:16, Deuteronomy 6:8, Deuteronomy 11:18

<sup>58</sup> Kiddushin 36a, Sanhedrin 4b, Menachot 34b, Zevachim 37b. (all in Talmud Bavli)

and "original" Judaism? They claim from this that it is Orthodox Judaism that has the unchanged infallible *mesorah* from mount Sinai. However, there are still arguments about this topic in the Talmud. therefore, there is not one *mesorah*. One example is that in Talmud Zevachim 37b (topic leTotafath) the debate is about the word Totafath. The text states that R.Akiva said that "tot" means two in Katpi (language) and "foth" means two in Afriki (language) this is how we know that it (see \*Totafath/tefillin<sup>59</sup>) entails four (compartments/sections in the tefillin). Menachot 34b describes in more detail the totafath.

The main question is why and how can one come to the conclusion that the tefillin has four compartments when you interpret not the word "tefillin", but "leTotafath" which allegedly means two in one language and two in another. This means that rabbinic Judaism not only reinterpreted a word differently, it Additionally, borrows words from two foreign languages to interpret leTotafat. Why would the Torah mention a concept or attribute that is not in biblical Hebrew? Moreover, why would the Torah assume that everybody knows the languages of Afriki and Kapti (Coptic?). And finally, how can one word have its roots in two different foreign languages? If the *mesorah* of *tefillin* was possibly true then surely it was written as tefillin in Old Hebrew, or we would have used the word "Totafat" instead of "tefillin". The only logical explanation is that these foreign words were used to justify the rabbinic tefillin (phylacteries). It could be the case that leTotafath was "originally" ( prior to 600 B.C) something non leather. However this remains a big question which hopefully archeology will solve one day. Alternatively, Totafath was a novelty which was added by the person who wrote these verses in the Torah.

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<sup>59</sup>\*The word letotafoth (frontlets) is being interpreted as modern day tefillin by rabbinic Judaism. See biblical Hebrew scripture.

## The Jewish Soul

The soul is a key concept in any religion, so to in Orthodox Judaism. However, all the sources that relate to the subject of the soul remain vague or are only clear because they were interpreted in a manner that should bring clarification. It is to each individual to believe in such "clarifications" and to trust the interpretation of the Orthodox rabbis.

Without the help and "insights" of the rabbis there is not one decent reliable source that explains the "Jewish soul" in a manner that can be related to the Torah (regular soul is mentioned in Genesis 2:7 and Leviticus 17:11). One might argue that this subject is not rational and that therefore, it is impossible to explain it in the rational sense. This is true, however I find it strange that Orthodox Judaism has come up with so many sources that deal with the soul that you would expect that people observed it as a material matter. For example, in Chabad and Breslov (Hasidic groups) literature it is written that the soul has five levels<sup>60</sup>, they are ordered as follows: *Nefesh* (indwelling soul), *Ruach* (spirit), *Neshama* (divine soul), *Chayah* (living essence), *Yechidah* (unique essence). How are these levels defined and measured? Are they five aspects? If so, then who and how does one define such an aspect? Where does that aspect or level of the soul begin and end? If one knows that there are five levels, then I assume that one also knows how to define and measure them somehow. If not, then I start to doubt one's knowledge about any level of the soul. Keep in mind that there are certain classifications attached to the five levels of the soul however they do not specify why this is the case or where one ends and another begins. For example, the *Nefesh* is related to action and the *Ruach* to speech. But is speech not an action? Moreover, the *Neshama* is related to Thought and *Chayah* to mind<sup>61</sup>, but what is the difference? The equivalent would be if one knows the answer to a mathematical equation but does not know how to count, I would come to think that one cheated to get the answer. The general answer to

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<sup>60</sup> Tanya, ch. 2. and Kramer, C., Sutton, A., & N. (1998). Anatomy of the soul. Jerusalem: Breslov Research Institute.  
p.21

<sup>61</sup> Kramer, C., Sutton, A., & N. (1998). Anatomy of the soul. Jerusalem: Breslov Research Institute. p.22

good questions about the soul is that it is related to Kabbalah and its secret texts. Text that are highly mystical and spiritual in nature, and that a 'normal' Jew would never be able to understand them. This sounds very interesting for somebody who seeks to learn about Orthodox Judaism but in practicality it is an impossibility. It is true that there are sources of Kabbalah that are open to the public however sources from the Kabbalah Centre are deemed unauthentic by Orthodox Judaism. This creates a situation where there is a monopoly on the "authentic" sources of the soul which can be used and explained by the liking of any given rabbi. This is just one example out of which one can come to understand the framework and organization of Orthodox Rabbinic Judaism. The Judaism that is dependent upon the interpretations of rabbis who currently hold important positions. You might come to think that in such a case Orthodox Judaism would be more flexible and progressive. However, this is not the case, it denies basic science and uses Kabbalah as a wild card for any given question that is difficult to answer.

The mystical text was not invented overnight in some Jewish town in Eastern Europe. I am sure that part of these mystical texts and wisdom have their roots at the times of King David. However, this does not mean that today's texts and concepts that cover the soul are the same. For example, the Zohar suddenly appeared in Spain sometime during the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. The vast majority of Orthodox Judaism accepts it as the legitimate text of the original Zohar that was lost. However, there is a very small group of Orthodox Jews that do not recognize it as the original Zohar.

Now let's move on to a very controversial topic that was used in the past to justify "antisemitism"<sup>62</sup> or rather anti-Judaism. The topic is called "the Jewish Soul" and it is often described as superior to the "non Jewish souls". However, before I will discuss this topic in detail the reader has to understand that Orthodox Jewish metaphysical supremacism has its roots in the concepts of the "chosen people"<sup>63</sup> who were the Israelites. It was the Israelites that were the first monotheists/Yahwist. However, there was never a connection to the "Jewish soul" because there was no concept of Judaism. And the chosen people were the different Israelite tribes. Therefore, the metaphysical superior Jewish soul must have been an invention by rabbinic (Orthodox) Judaism. One can ask the question what the reasons of the rabbis were to install the concept of

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<sup>62</sup> Many Jews are not Semites

<sup>63</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6-8

metaphysical supremacy of the Jewish soul. One possible option is that it comes from being closer to the true monotheistic God because one does not worship idols. This could be linked with the verse "*you shall be a light unto the nations*":

(6) I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, **and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;** (7) To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." (Isaiah 42 :6-7)

Although it is understandable that Orthodox Judaism conceives itself as important because it has the task to "*bring light unto the nations*" (gentiles), it forgets other writings that seem to weaken this arrogant stance towards non-Orthodox Jews and non-Jews. For example, it is written in Pirkei Avot 4:1 that "*who is honored? He who honors the created beings*". However, one can still honor all created beings and still feel superior over them. The primary source for Jewish metaphysical supremacy is the *Tanya*. This book was written by rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadia and is associated with the Hasidic Orthodox group called Chabad. Let's now look at the writings of the *Tanya* that are so controversial. *Tanya* part one verse 17-18 describes that "*the souls of the nations*" come from the *Qlipoth* (shell) which contains no good. And all that the nations (gentiles) do is done out of selfish motivations<sup>64</sup>. Alan Silver describes this as a "racist idea"<sup>65</sup>

### Likkutei Amarim.1.17 (Sefaria.org):

כִּי בֵּין־רָאֵל נֶפֶשׁ זו דְּקַלִּפָּה, הִיא מִקְלִיפָּת נֹגָה, שִׁישׁ בָּה גַּם כֵּן טוֹב, הִיא מִסּוֹד עַז הַקְּצֻעָה טוֹב וְרָע:

*For in the case of Israel, this soul of the kelipah is derived from kelipat nogah, which also contains good, as it originates in the esoteric “tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.”*

<sup>64</sup> [http://www.sefaria.org/Tanya,\\_Part\\_One,\\_The\\_Book\\_of\\_the\\_Average\\_Men.1.17?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en](http://www.sefaria.org/Tanya,_Part_One,_The_Book_of_the_Average_Men.1.17?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en)

<sup>65</sup> Silver, A. (2008). Jews, myth and history: A critical exploration of contemporary Jewish belief and its origins. Leicester: Matador. p.127

### Likkutei Amarim.1.18 (Sefaria.org):

מה שאין כן נפשות אומות העולם, הן מושאר קליפות טמאות, שאין בהן טוב כלל, כמו שכתוב בעין חיים שער מ"ט פרק ג'. וכל טיבו דעתך היותר לגרמייהו עבדיו, וכראיתא בגמרא על פסוק: "יחסד לאומות שטאת"—שכל צדקה והצדקה שאותות העולם עושים, אין אלא להתייחס כי:

*"The souls of the nations of the world, however, emanate from the other, unclean kelipot which contain no good whatsoever, as is written in Etz Chaim, Portal 49, ch. 3, that all the good that the nations do is done from selfish motives. So the Gemara comments on the verse, "The kindness of the nations is sin"—that all the charity and kindness done by the nations of the world is only for their own self-glorification, and so on."*

.However one has to keep in mind that the *Tanya* is not talking about the physical. therefore, it cannot be a "racist" concept. It can only be considered a religious metaphysical supremacist concept because it relates to the soul and religion. Additionally, Geoffrey W. Dennis also describes this "metaphysical racism" as problematic because its teaches that the non-Jewish soul comes from the realm of evil (*Sitra Achra*)<sup>66</sup>.

The *Tanya* then continues in part two verse one, it states that the "*Jewish soul is truly part of God*". It also quotes texts from the *Zohar*. One could think that this kind of religious metaphysical supremacism comes from within the Hasidic world because of the anti-Jewish sentiment in Europe at the time. However, this is not the case because the *Tanya* makes a reference to the Talmud on *Bava Batra* 10b. In the Talmud<sup>67</sup> R.Jochanan Ben Zakkai states to his disciples: what is the meaning of the verse, "*righteousness exalteth a nation, but the kindness of peoples is a sin*". The answer is that the former refers to Israel and the latter to the heathens. He then continues that the charity and kindness which is done by the heathen is considered as a sin, because they only do it to magnify themselves. R.Joshua states a similar answer, "*the kindness of peoples is sin*" because they only do it so that their dominion may be prolonged. Gamliel answers that the "*kindness of people is sin*" because all the charity and kindness that the heathens do is counted as

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<sup>66</sup> Dennis, G. W. (2007). The encyclopedia of Jewish myth, magic and mysticism. Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications. p.254

<sup>67</sup> *Bava Batra* 10b

sin because they only do it to show haughtiness, and for being haughty one is send to *Gehennom* (Hell).

One has to be careful not to interpret heathen as "gentile" or "non-Jew" in the Talmud. The word heathen is normally only used in correlation with somebody that not a monotheist (also called a worshiper of the stars). Additionally, It is strange that the Tanya translates heathens to gentiles because not every gentile is a heathen.

## The Rashi, Corporeal<sup>68</sup> controversy

The Issue surrounding this topic was already published in the late 2009. However, I only discovered it in 2011/2012 and was shocked when a friend told me about this academic article which was written by Rabbi Natan Slifkin<sup>69</sup> (former Haredi). The article was, and still is very controversial, especially in the Haredi and Hasidic communities. Some people in the Orthodox world did not even want to read the article because "it was too academic". For me it was shocking that the Orthodox community did not address this issue at all. Even if one claims that Rashi was not a corporeal one should at least give a reasonable counter argument that goes beyond "It is not so because Rashi was a great Torah scholar". For me it only proved that Orthodox Judaism is selectively choosing what to read and believe when looking at scripture and other sources while claiming to be "authentic". One might say that it is not a big issue and that it does not have an impact on Orthodox Judaism. However, I disagree with such statements because Rashi is the main commentator on the verses in the Torah. He gives explanations on the text and therefore, he is one of most important sources when studying Orthodox Judaism and scripture.

I am not stating that because Rashi could be a corporeal that all his sources are invalid. I am only saying that it could be the case that other commentators have to be used when reading commentary on certain verses in the Torah (If you consider yourself a serious Orthodox Jew). Moreover, the strong possibility that Rashi was a corporeal presents a situation of instability and insecurity with regard to mesorah. Because one would assume that there is a clear manner/perspective on how to perceive God would be embedded in the mesorah.

The argument in the article that could prove that Rashi was a corporeal are: (1) Majority of the rabbi's in Northern France had doubts about God's incorporeality. (2) Rashi comments on Exodus 7:4) as follows: "My hand" (yad mamash) " An actual hand to take/smite) them" (Et Yadey.

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<sup>68</sup> **Corporeal:** Having a body:a corporeal God . <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/corporeal>

<sup>69</sup> Gives good reasons why Rashi could be a corporeal, however does not explicitly say so. ( Slifkin, N. (2009). Was Rashi a Corporeal?

Yad mamash LeHachot beheem)<sup>70</sup>. However, Rashi sometimes comments on scripture with "yad" and gives an allegorical explanation it<sup>71</sup>. (3) Rashi comments on the verse "in our image" in Genesis 1:26 "With our mold (defus). "As our form" – To understand and to comprehend"<sup>72</sup>. (4) Other statements by Rashi that suggest that he was a corporealists can be found in the commentary on the Talmud\*<sup>73</sup>. There are other pro and contra arguments in believing that Rashi was a corporealists. However overall it must be evident by now that there are some serious issues with some of Rashi's explanations if you are reading it as an Orthodox Jew. I suggest that one reads the entire article of Natan Slifkin's "Was Rashi a Corporealists?" if one has doubts on any matter that was written.

When looking at the Artscroll stone edition *Chumash*<sup>74</sup> one can see that the translated English explanation does not cover the text on Exodus 7:4 "et yadi" which leads to Rashi's comments "yad mamash". Rather it only explains in English the words "Tsvotai" (my legions/army). Now the obvious question is why did it not translate the Rashi into English and took instead another word and commentary in the verse to Translate? Although the Rashi is written down on the same page it remains questionable why it is not translated into English, because he is the most prominent commentator on many Jewish sources. It could be the case that it is too controversial to translate for the general public. Alternatively, one can say that the publisher did Orthodox Judaism a favor by omitting potential heretical statements. However, the question is why did they leave in the Rashi script. One could argue that some of Rashi's statements could lead to corporealists beliefs and thoughts on God, and therefore, these comments must be erased from every book. Additionally, it is much easier to pretend that there is no issue and to forget about it then to erase the entire Rashi text on that verse.

**I always thought that Orthodox Judaism was a religion that tried to debate and discuss opinions and problems with certain texts. However, that is not the case when the issue directly or indirectly attacks the mesorah or great Torah scholars. I perceive this issue as a perfect example of rabbinic (Orthodox) Judaism and its failures. People make mistakes. However, when one claims that great rabbi's and the sages (chazal) are infallible because they had**

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<sup>70</sup> Scherman, R. N. (1998,2000). The Chumash: The Torah, Haftaros And The Five Megillos With Commentary Anthologized From The Rabbinic Writings. New York: Mesorah Publications. P,324 (In the Rashi script)

<sup>71</sup> Slifkin, N. (2009). Was Rashi a Corporealists? Hakirah, 07. p 85. Retrieved from <http://www.hakirah.org>

<sup>72</sup>Ibid p.86

<sup>73</sup>Ibid. p88 \* Berachot 6a, Eruvin 21a

<sup>74</sup> Scherman, R. N. (1998,2000). The Chumash: The Torah, Haftaros And The Five Megillos With Commentary Anthologized From The Rabbinic Writings. New York: Mesorah Publications. P,324

**prophecy or an unchanged mesorah from Moses, these issues remain in the Orthodox system.**

One of my friends told me that after he read the Rashi article by Natan Slifkin he did not change anything that was related to his Orthodox lifestyle. He said that there is a real big problem but that he can't see an alternative for Orthodox Judaism.

The "unchanged" mesorah is fallible and changed because great rabbis were not clear enough to the point that there is this Rashi, corporeal discussion. If the mesorah was unchanged and infallible then surely we would not have this many contradicting Talmud and now (with Rashi) even potential heretical scripture debates about the meaning of a verse. Even if Rashi was not a corporealist then why is it that Orthodox Judaism cannot make a decent counter argument? Moreover, if one argues that Rashi is not a corporealist, then why was Rashi not clear enough about God not being corporeal? One could continue with potential argument however in my experience most of the people that live a Haredi and Hasidic life (maybe even some Modern Orthodox) are not interested in an academical discussion. therefore, for rabbi Natan Slifkin to write such an article must have been a tremendous undertaking.

## **\*Concluding int notes\***

The notion of “Jewish” is a Rabbinic Jewish concept just like the “Jewish soul”. Instead the biblical term “Israelites” should be used which is a combination of all the Monotheistic/YHWH tribes.

Rabbinic Judaism originated in the 2nd century. It came from the Jewish Pharisees. The Talmud is the rabbinic writings known as Oral Law, and these writing became a core part of Judaism for Rabbinic Jews. The Hebrew scriptures are interpreted through the Talmud.

Orthodox Judaism is a very closed off world and one will never fully be embedded until one converts and becomes part of the community.

Even the Orthodox world is not living in harmony with one and other as there are many different religious rulings that can divide different ethnical groups, which is split up again into different religious groups/sects.

Extremely difficult to convince any Orthodox Jew to become Christian. One can only “plant a seed” in the hope that a person will become a believer at some point in their life.

When you come from Europe the following question will be asked to you if you live in Israel:  
“How did your grandparents survived the holocaust” (Test question for Jewishness)

Women don’t give man a hand and vice versa.

No electricity on Shabbat.

Future of Israel continues towards a state of conflict (internal + external)

Conflict lifestyle Tel-Aviv vs Jerusalem.

Most covert location to operate from: Haifa (most mixed population)

Most effective actions: Charity > Food packages.

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